

FOCH

My Conversations With the Marshal



RAYMOND RECOULY

F 52

THE AMERICA PRESS
LIBRARY

F O C H



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2022 with funding from
Kahle/Austin Foundation

<https://archive.org/details/fochmyconversati0000unse>

THE AMERICA PRESS
LIBRARY.



La Victoire va toujours à
ceux qui la méritent par
la plus grande force de
Volonté et d'Intelligence

G. Foch

F O C H

MY CONVERSATIONS WITH THE MARSHAL

BY

RAYMOND RECOULY

TRANSLATED BY

JOYCE DAVIS, B.A.



D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK MCMXXIX

COPYRIGHT, 1929, BY D. APPLETON & COMPANY,

COPYRIGHT, 1929, BY LES ÉDITIONS DE FRANCE
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PREFACE

THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK

THIS volume contains some of the absorbing conversations I had with the Marshal during the ten years from 1919 to the end of 1928, in which year he fell a victim to the long illness from which he was not, alas, to recover.

Some time after the War, Foch allowed me to visit him regularly, about twice a month, sometimes more, but rarely less. I knew him already, for he had granted me a long interview in November, 1916, prior to my departure on my Russian mission (in which he took the keenest interest), and again when I returned in 1917, just before the Bolshevik *coup d'état*.

The moral and intellectual pleasure this custom afforded me soon made of it a genuine necessity. When the interval between visits was longer than usual (for example, when I was away in the summer), I felt that something was missing. I had lost something; I was like a pilot who knows that his compass needs regulating. So I would speedily telephone to one of his officers, and nearly always came the same answer: “The Marshal will be at home at about five o’clock.

PREFACE

He will be ready for you when his mail is signed."

Foch granted me entire and unreserved confidence, which I count as an inestimable mark of honour and is the source of very great joy and pride to me. He spoke to me, freely and without reticence, of all the great military and political affairs with which he had been associated during the War, the peace negotiations and the years that followed. He told me, in his frank manner and abrupt, picturesque language, of the part he had played, of his far-seeing, objective judgments on men and things. He did still more. He allowed me several times to consult some of his precious documents and certain parts of his diary, as well as his magnificent letters to Joffre during the battle of the Yser. I find it hard to tell which they honour most, the General who wrote them, or the Commander who could inspire so fine a correspondence.

The larger portion of this book, especially those sections dealing with the Armistice, the Supreme Command, and the Peace Treaty, I proposed, with the express permission of the Marshal, to publish in his lifetime, a few years ago. I had submitted the manuscript to him; he had read it, approved it, and with his own hand inserted a few after-touches. At the last minute, when I was about to pass it for press, Foch was attacked by scruples. The collapse of the franc was then in rapid progress.

"All this," he said, "might very well arouse protests

PREFACE

and polemics. Is this the moment for it, when our country and our currency are in such terrible straits? Let us wait a little longer!"

Of course, I did not press him. I waited; then I was away travelling; then the Marshal was ill. . . . And now, it is not only my right but my duty not to defer for an instant the publication of a book which shows the greatest military leader of our time, and of all times, in his true light. It shows his intellectual and moral qualities, his logic, and his genius. The part he played, large as it already seems, will prove still larger in view of the military, political and psychological difficulties he had to confront in the exercise of his command; and because of the tact, subtlety and diplomacy, energy and will-power he had to exert in order to secure co-operation and good-will amongst a heterogeneous collection of French, English, Belgians, Americans, Italians, Portuguese, Australians and Canadians. It will be better understood that our good fortune in possessing such a man at such a moment was nothing short of miraculous.

All the great military leaders of all the other belligerent countries—Germany, England, America and Italy, headed by those purely nominal leaders, the Kaiser and the Crown Prince—one and all have written their memoirs; so, too, have nearly all the prominent politicians; only the majority of great French leaders, Clemenceau, Foch, Joffre, have been silent. Foch, it is true, has left some Memoirs, but from what

PREFACE

I have seen of them I judge them to deal exclusively with military matters.

That silence cannot and will not last, for History has rights of her own. It is to the interest of us all to learn from those who managed our affairs how those affairs were managed.

The tale about to be unfolded will raise a part of the veil over the greatest questions of the War and the Peace, the Supreme Command, the relations between the Allied Staffs, the Armistice, the Peace Treaty. That is its main object. In dealing with these questions, I have reproduced with minute fidelity, with almost photographic exactitude, the words actually spoken to me by the Marshal. My memory is naturally excellent, and, enhanced as it is by long professional practice, I can easily retrace any conversation, however lengthy, word for word, without alterations or omissions.

As soon as I left the Marshal I was careful to write in detail whatever he had just told me. I have left in this account of his conversations the staccato manner in which Foch sometimes spoke, with his vivid expressions and abrupt leaps from one idea to another, his reiterations and detours.

My one ambition is that all those who really knew the Marshal may say as they read this book, "That's just how he used to talk!"

His judgments on our politicians will probably make distasteful reading for some of them; they may pos-

PREFACE

sibly provoke protests and criticisms. I shall be sorry if this proves to be the case, but I cannot help it.

This book has but one aim: to show Foch as he was, to make him tell his tale as he really told it. My duty is to delete nothing, to mitigate nothing, of his words. Foch never spoke lightly, even in private. His least thoughts were uttered with deliberation after careful consideration. Most of the things he told me were said to me not once, but ten times.

My part in this book is limited to noting down his words with almost religious care, so that they may be lasting.

I should add this: no one, I believe, will read unstirred the section entitled *The Drama of the Peace Treaty*. It was indeed a drama as Foch told it. With military precision, constantly referring to documents, he showed me a very Calvary, the long, sorrowful course of his efforts to prevent injustice from being perpetrated. On the morrow of a victory that had bled France white and ruined her, what frontiers was she to accept from her enemy, Germany? Not even those of 1814, but those of 1815, the frontiers of a vanquished country, of a country twice vanquished.

Thus, in the matter of these frontiers, we stand now, after Rethondes, precisely where we stood after Waterloo.

Nothing can explain, nothing can excuse such madness, due to the weakness of those who directed our affairs and to the selfishness and lack of understand-

PREFACE

ing of our Allies. To prevent it, Foch did all that was humanly possible. He did everything short of breaking his sword, which would have served only to deprive us of the invaluable services he was afterwards to render us.

These efforts, slightly or wrongly known to the public, I want to set forth. Whether Foch or his opponents were right, History will decide if she has not, indeed, already decided.

R. R.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
PREFACE: THE CONTENTS OF THIS BOOK	V
PART I	
THE WAR	
CHAPTER	
I. 8 BIS, BOULEVARD DES INVALIDES	3
II. HOW FOCH SPOKE AND HOW HE WORKED	6
III. HOW FOCH WAS APPOINTED TO THE SUPREME COMMAND	9
IV. THE FUNCTION OF A GENERALISSIMO: FOCH ON THE SUPREME COMMAND	14
V. FOCH AND THE AMERICAN ARMY: GRAVE DIFFER- ENCES WITH CLEMENCEAU	22
VI. THE STORY OF THE ARMISTICE	29
VII. THE STORY OF THE ARMISTICE: THE RHINELAND QUESTION AND DISAGREEMENT WITH CLEMEN- CEAU	39
VIII. THE STORY OF THE ARMISTICE: DISAGREEMENT WITH THE ENGLISH: HOW FOCH IMPOSED HIS VIEWS	47
IX. ACCORDING TO FOCH, THE WAR COULD HAVE BEEN WON A YEAR EARLIER	53
X. FOCH ON JOFFRE: UNPUBLISHED LETTERS WRIT- TEN DURING THE BATTLE OF THE YSER	66
XI. FOCH ON LUDENDORFF: WHY THE LATTER WAS BEATEN	83
XII. FOCH EXPLAINS THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE AND THE PART HE PLAYED	95

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XIII. FOCH EXPLAINS THE LATE WAR	108
XIV. FOCH'S VIEWS ON THE WAR AND THE ARMY OF THE FUTURE	116
XV. FOCH ON NAPOLEON	118
XVI. FOCH AND THE MARCH ON BERLIN	131
XVII. FOCH ON THE UNITED STATES	136
XVIII. FOCH ON GERMANY	139
XIX. A DARK HOUR IN FOCH'S LIFE: HE IS NEARLY "SHUNTED"	142
XX. WHEN FOCH FIRST GLIMPSED VICTORY	149
XXI. VIEWS ON MILITARY HISTORY	151

PART II

THE DRAMA OF THE PEACE TREATY

XXII. THE TWO ESSENTIALS	159
XXIII. FOCH'S PRINCIPLES	168
XXIV. ERRORS COMMITTED BY LEADING STATESMEN	173
XXV. THE TWO THEORIES CONTRASTED	179
XXVI. THE CRITICAL MOMENT	182
XXVII. FOCH'S APPEAL	185
XXVIII. A TRAGIC SITUATION	190
XXIX. FOCH BEFORE THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS	197
XXX. FOCH AT THE PLENARY MEETING OF THE CON- FERENCE	209
XXXI. FOCH REFUSES TO SEND A TELEGRAM	215
XXXII. LESSONS TAUGHT BY HISTORY	220

PART III

MISCELLANEOUS AND PERSONAL

XXXIII. FOCH ON RUSSIA	231
XXXIV. FOCH ON GAMBETTA	239
XXXV. FOCH ON REPARATIONS	242

CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXXVI. POINCARÉ AND LLOYD GEORGE	245
XXXVII. FRANCE AND GERMANY AFTER THE WAR: LLOYD GEORGE	247
XXXVIII. FOCH AND THE RUHR	251
XXXIX. FOCH ON THE FRENCH POLICY: MILLERAND, POINCARÉ: "THE FALLOW LAND" AND "THE BELLS"	257
XL. FOCH ON THE COLLAPSE OF THE FRANC	262
XLI. AFTER THE ELECTIONS	265
XLII. FOCH AND THE NEW EUROPE	267
XLIII. FOCH AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS	272
XLIV. FINANCIAL CRISIS: LOCARNO	276
XLV. THE GODS IN THE FRENCH MACHINE	280
XLVI. POINCARÉ, LYAUTHEY, WINSTON CHURCHILL	286
XLVII. FOCH AND EUROPEAN PEACE	289
XLVIII. FOCH AND WEYGAND	292
XLIX. HOW FOCH LIVED IN THE COUNTRY	269
L. FOCH AND THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT	301
LI. THE SECRET OF A GREAT LEADER: THOUGHT AND ACTION	306
LII. THE APOTHEOSIS OF FOCH	311
LIII. MY LAST CONVERSATIONS WITH THE MARSHAL	314
LIV. A GLANCE AT THE NEW EUROPE	317

~~SECRET~~ LE COMMANDEMENT UNIQUE

N'oublie pas être le qui un vain peuple peine . .

Je ne connais rien de plus réconfortant, de plus tonifiant que ces entretiens avec le Maréchal ,chez qui je viens de passer près d'une heure . Qu'il parle de politique ou de stratégie, les idées qu'il expose, les propos qu'il tient, il vous semble toujours au moment où vous le quittez, que vous auriez pu sans effort, les trouver de vous-même. La conversation des hommes supérieurs donne toujours cette impression-là. Tout ce qu'ils disent, même quand c'est très original et très profond,apparaît comme la simplicité même.

PAGE OF M. RECOULY'S TEXT CORRECTED AND ANNOTATED
IN MARSHAL FOCH'S OWN HAND

PART I
THE WAR

I

8 BIS, BOULEVARD DES INVALIDES

AFTER the War, the Marshal lived in the Boulevard de Courcelles, in a house that was once the Spanish Embassy; then he moved to *8 bis*, Boulevard des Invalides, which was better fitted for his officers and himself.

The wide avenue, unmolested by trams and frequented by little traffic, is bordered by small, low, modest houses, which in their harmonious regularity seem to have been built specially to shelter the labours and studies of some of the chiefs of our Army. Compared with most Paris streets, it appears calm and restful, deep in the shadow of the monumental dome where sleeps the greatest warrior of all times. It was there that Foch, his admirer and his equal, came to settle.

Everything speaks of order, precision, discipline. The courtyards, the staircases, the corridors and the rooms have about them something of the nudity and austerity of a monastery. With few visitors, empty antechambers, lack of movement and noise, all the houses on the street are in striking contrast to the Ministries.

MARSHAL FOCH

On the first floor of one of these little houses, a wide staircase leads to a long corridor where two soldiers used to be stationed. The nearest rooms were occupied by two or three Staff Officers, nearly always the same ones. (My old friend, Colonel de Mierry, my fellow-soldier in Champagne, Flanders and many other places, never left the Marshal, save during his obligatory stay in a cavalry regiment and his term at the Staff College.) After that, came the orderly-room, the officers of which—Captain Lhopital and Commandant Bugnet—had also been for many years with Foch. Then the sanctum of the Chief of Staff, occupied by Weygand for seven or eight years. And at the back, a large room with two windows overlooking the courtyard: the Marshal's room. The furniture was very simple; papers littered a big table; maps covered the walls, maps of the Rhineland, our northern and eastern frontiers, and, very much to the fore, a map of Europe, constantly under the eye of Foch.

The Marshal's subordinates divided the work among themselves according to instructions given, once and for all, by him. The plan worked with clock-like precision and needed no further supervision.

Men of genuine superiority, whose existences are full of matters of import, give one, during the few seconds spent with them, the impression that they are solely concerned with the subject under discussion, that they

8 BIS, BOULEVARD DES INVALIDES

have never had, and never will have, any other matter to consider. Excitement, trepidation and bustle have no place in their lives. While one was with Foch, for example, the telephone-bell never rang. In exceptional circumstances, an orderly or his Chief of Staff might enter with urgent communications. Apart from that, he attended only to his caller. Poincaré, doubtless for the same reasons, and also because he knows how to arrange his life with harmony and order, rarely allows himself to be disturbed during an interview, either by telephone calls or by interruptions from his staff.

On the other hand, there are many ministers, and therefore many of their subordinates, to whom an entire sentence cannot be uttered without interruption from the telephone. The minister (or his subordinate) speaks for two or three minutes down the mouthpiece. The conversation is then resumed, but not for long. Another ring from the bell; the receiver is once more seized; and in the caller's mind there remains only a wild urge to leave the building and abandon the man to the bustle of his flurried life.

II

HOW FOCH SPOKE AND HOW HE WORKED

IN conversation with Foch, an important question often arose. Then the Marshal would look at his interlocutor and his hand would cut the air in a brusque gesture.

“Wait,” he would say.

Silence followed, during which Foch would seize what he regarded as the essential import of the question. No man in the world was so impatient of preambles and rhetoric; certainly no one dispensed as he did with transitions between subjects. This jerkiness was at first disconcerting to one not used to the lack of continuity in his methods. He would throw a sudden beam of light onto whichever idea seemed to him the most important. Once he had illuminated it, he would not leave it before extracting everything it contained. He would then pass on to another subject, judging that enough had been said on the first.

He was like a man ordered to weed a patch of land. He would leap among the strongest, thickest weeds, hack away their leaves, tear up the roots that hindered

HOW FOCH SPOKE AND WORKED

him. With Foch, only the essential counted; with details and accessories he was not concerned. He admitted of no formal procedure, no studied style, no ready-made formulæ. His simple, vigorous manner of expressing himself was well fitted to his thoughts; his concise, accurate phrases followed rapidly on each other, as though in haste to arrive at a goal.

The following trait was characteristic of him. It often happened at an interview that I revived an important subject dealt with in my previous visit. I was always amazed and filled with admiration to discover that during the interval of a week or fortnight, the Marshal had thoroughly revolved the question in his mind. A great and impressive work had been accomplished in him. The seed had become a tree with wide-spreading roots and branches and abundant foliage. Foch would then discuss the question, previously a mere suggestion, with astonishing precision and fullness. He would link it to others, assign to it a place in the whole and reveal unsuspected causes and connections.

I remarked upon it to him one day.

"I always work in that way," he said, "and I believe it is a very good way. It is best to carry about with you for some time the subjects you study, so that they have a chance to take root in your mind. I think about them when I get up in the morning, when I go to

MARSHAL FOCH

bed at night and while I am walking. Continuous thought about them breeds other pertinent ideas, and then, one fine day, you see that you have much to say, too much, even, on the question engrossing your mind. Instead of adding to it, you find yourself obliged to cut it short."

III

HOW FOCH WAS APPOINTED TO THE SUPREME COMMAND

MANY things have been said about the circumstances in which I was made *generalissimo*," Foch said one day. "Many of them were inexact or only partly exact. This is how it happened:

"On March 21, 1918, Ludendorff, who from a tactical point of view had admirably prepared his army, took the offensive against two British Armies, the Third and the Fifth. One of them was completely shattered. All the lines were carried. For the first days of the attack nothing could stop the mad onrush of the German troops.

"On March 24, I went to Clemenceau with a letter embodying my opinions. My conclusion was absolutely definite. I said: 'Nothing is ready for the maintenance of an indispensable collaboration between the French and British Armies.'

"'So you are abandoning me,' answered Clemenceau.

"'No,' I said, 'I am not abandoning you, but nothing is ready.'

"'The Commanders-in-Chief are in agreement. I

MARSHAL FOCH

have lunched with Haig and I am going to dine with Pétain.'

"To which I answered: 'Battles are not directed over the luncheon table.'

"On the occasion of a meeting of the Versailles Committee at which Pichon, Clemenceau and myself were present, I said to Clemenceau, who was not anxious for me to speak: 'A formidable offensive is in preparation, but the essential measures for repulsing it have not been taken.'

"You know that the danger appeared so great that there had been talk of removing the Government and Ministries from Paris, as in 1914. M. Poincaré, when sounded on the matter, stated point-blank that for the moment he refused to countenance the departure.

"On the evening of Sunday, March 23, M. Clemenceau had called on M. Poincaré to announce that if the situation did not improve rapidly, the Government ought to prepare to remove itself from the capital. M. Poincaré answered that he had left Paris once in 1914, that he refused to leave it again, and that, in any case, his departure was impossible for the time being.

"On the 25th," continued Foch, "I was due to go to Abbeville.

"At eleven o'clock, Clemenceau telephoned to me. 'There is a Council of War at Compiègne,' he said,

THE SUPREME COMMAND

‘Come yourself and send General Weygand to Abbeville.’

“At the gare du Nord, I met Javary, who managed the Communications Department. He said: ‘All is lost unless you save Amiens. It is the centre of all our communications.’

“At Compiègne, we met in a house on the outskirts of the town, which was under continual bombardment. Lord Milner, the accredited representative of the British Government, who had been sent to France at the urgent request of General Sir Douglas Haig, had just arrived. The President of the Republic, Clemenceau, General Milner, Pétain and myself consulted together. But as General Haig was not there, it was impossible to do anything. It was decided that the following day, at the Hôtel de Ville at Doullens, a conference should be held to discuss and settle the question of a sole command.

“Scarcely had I returned to Paris, to my home in the Avenue de Saxe, when Weygand, back from Abbeville, came to tell me what he had learned from Haig and the English general, Wilson. The latter had been to see him, and had spoken as follows:

“It appears that Clemenceau is to be Commander-in-Chief of the War, with Foch as his Chief of Staff. The scheme is impracticable. The English would most certainly oppose it. It is not Clemenceau’s business to

MARSHAL FOCH

conduct the armies. Who would govern in his place? His work is quite heavy enough already.'

"On the following day, the 26th, we left for Dury, then for Doullens, where we arrived late. General Sir Douglas Haig was holding a conference with his generals, and while it lasted we waited in the Hôtel de Ville, and ate the sandwiches wisely brought by Pétain's orderly.

"You know the rest. At first it was proposed that I should be given the command of the Reserve Armies around Amiens, at the point of juncture of English and French troops.

"Clemenceau agreed.

"'But that is not enough,' said Haig. 'Foch must have command of the whole of the Western Front.'

"Clemenceau agreed to that, too.

"I then told them in a few very short sentences how I understood the situation.

"When lunch was over, Clemenceau came up to me and said, in half-complimentary, half-sarcastic tones: 'Well! You have got it at last, your High Command.'

"To which I answered: 'I have to thank you for your generosity. You present me with a lost battle and it has got to be won.'

"'Anyhow, you have got what you wanted.'

"'You should not say that,' intervened Foucheur. General Foch is accepting the Command because he

THE SUPREME COMMAND

loves his country, certainly not for his own pleasure.'

"And that," said Foch, "is an exact account of the circumstances in which I was appointed to the Supreme Command."

"I have often heard English statesmen say, sir, that it was unnecessary for the French to impose a supreme command upon them. But it now appears that it was Sir Douglas Haig especially who demanded it, and he did so because he was sure that Foch, whom he trusted utterly, was the man to wield it."

IV

THE FUNCTION OF A *GENERALISSIMO*: FOCH ON THE SUPREME COMMAND

I KNOW of nothing more comforting and more tonic than were those interviews with the Marshal. Whether he spoke of politics or stratagems, it appeared to his departing visitor that the ideas elucidated and the phrases formed might well have come from his own mind. The conversation of men of real parts always gives that impression. Everything they say, however original and profound it be, seems simplicity itself.

After speaking of Germany's affairs, the Marshal came round to the War and the Supreme Command.

"It is continually said," he began, "that the situation was saved in the spring of 1918 by the Sole Command. It seems to be endowed with some magic power. It is made into a talisman which by its all-powerful virtue transformed defeat into victory overnight.

"That is a puerile idea. It is mere illusion to believe that a few lines on a scrap of paper put into a man's hand can straightway change the course of events. The Sole Command resembles strategic plans;

FUNCTION OF A *GENERALISSIMO*

the worth of both lies above all in the manner of their execution. The German General Staff had an excellent plan of war in 1914. They lost the fight because the plan was badly carried out or not accomplished at all.

“The same might be said of the Supreme Command. In 1917, the English Army was for a short time under the orders of the French Commander-in-Chief. That in itself did not cause us to win the War, while there is no doubt that we could have won it by other means.

“On the other hand, in the autumn of 1914, before and during the battle of the Yser, I was suddenly sent to the North as deputy to the Commander-in-Chief, and *theoretically*, I had no authority over the English and Belgian Armies. Yet it may be said without exaggeration that these two armies acted in accordance with my views and guidance.

“During the most critical moments—and they were many—I took the initiative and found solutions to problems. These solutions were acted upon as though they came from a recognized chief.

“On October 16, I had an interview with the King of the Belgians. His troops were exhausted by the retreat, and it was essential that they should stand firm at the Yser or very near it, and not, as had been suggested, fall to the rear. I expressed my views frankly

MARSHAL FOCH

and somewhat crisply—in grave circumstances, I never mince matters. My royal interlocutor has borne me no malice. He is far too noble to stoop to that. On several later occasions, he has reminded me of the scene. ‘You were perfectly right,’ he said, ‘to speak as you did. It was the best way, in fact the only way, of making your views felt. The situation might not have been saved otherwise.’

“On October 31, 1914, at the most ominous moment of the battle of Ypres, I learnt that Field-Marshal French was contemplating retreat, which might have brought about disaster. As soon as I heard this, I sat down in the Mairie at Vlamertinghe, where d’Urbal was in command, and wrote briefly what I felt the English Army should at once proceed to do. A few minutes later I gave the letter to Field-Marshal French, and told him, with all the force at my command, my reasons for writing it. He thought a moment, took it, added some notes and charged General Sir Douglas Haig to act upon it.

“In critical circumstances, that is the only way to obtain results. A man’s character and mind must come into full play. The people whom he wishes to influence and lead must not only be pushed ahead; they must understand clearly where they are being pushed. That is why, in certain cases, a clear, precise note that will allow of no discussion is indispensable. They then

FUNCTION OF A *GENERALISSIMO*

weigh the consequences of refusal and gauge their own responsibility. It nearly always succeeds.

“To put it briefly, a sole command cannot be imposed by decree upon the leaders of other nations and other races. It can be accepted by them only through the influence of the man in whom it is vested.

“See what happened in 1918. At the Mairie at Doullens, I was given the task of coöordinating the movements of the Allies. I gave my point of view in a few words, then we settled down to compose the letter defining my powers. A first draft proposed to give me the command of the Reserve Armies in the Beauvais region, where the French and English troops met. At the request of Sir Douglas Haig himself, this was rejected as incomplete and insufficient. Finally, we adopted another draft, which extended my command to the whole of the Western Front. The English and French Governments joined in giving me this task.

“I must confess that I attached very little weight to the business of wording the letter. One draft or another draft, one line more or less on the papers I was given, had no great significance to me. In no way did I persist in obtaining fuller *theoretical* powers. Those I already had were ample for me. If I succeeded, they would inevitably be extended. This in fact happened.

“The two essentials of my post were action, and speedy action. That was how I regarded my function

MARSHAL FOCH

and to those ends I brought all my strength into play.

“The conference at Doullens was scarcely ended when I busied myself with stemming the British retreat. I rushed to General Gough’s H.Q. at Dury (two kilometres south of Amiens). The first thing to do was to urge Gough into action. (He was at the head of the Fifth English Army.) That I did with all the energy and ardour at my command. However exhausted that army might be, it had an urgent and critical part to play, a part that it must play at all costs. It was to hold its position until Débeney’s army was constituted.”

This matter of the Supreme Command and its relations to the generals and armies of other lands, traditions and temperaments, was one of the salient points in the last War. Too much importance cannot be attached to it. That is the reason why Foch dwelt on the subject.

One evening when I was with him, a large sheet of paper lay on his table; it was covered with his clear, regular writing. He read it to me in its entirety. It was the beginning of a chapter of his Memoirs dealing with the battle of the Yser. Foch, looking from afar at those events, gave a keen, vigorous summary of the most prominent features of the battle.

“It was won by three quite different armies,” he told

FUNCTION OF A *GENERALISSIMO*

me: "the Belgian Army, led by the King himself; the British Army, under Field-Marshal French; and the French Army, the elements of which arrived in the North in driblets, after a long and difficult train journey.

"In spite of the diversity of the components of those armies, and in spite of complications arising therefrom, there was a constant unity of inspiration emanating from the French Command. This unity was due to the confidence it aroused, to the clearness of the plans it proposed and the firmness of their execution.

"When several armies are in the field together, it is absolutely impossible to evolve any unity of command save by this moral influence. In other words, force is useless, whereas persuasion is all-powerful. The armies may differ in formation, even in value; their leaders have characters, customs and temperaments peculiar to themselves; each one is dependent upon his own Government. Each instinctively tends to believe that he is doing far more than his neighbour. Nothing is more natural, more human than such a feeling. When additional efforts are required of them it would be of no use to give them imperious orders, or drive them. They must be animated by the same wishes and hold the same convictions as their commander. Persuasion is infinitely more helpful than coercion.

MARSHAL FOCH

“From such ideas I constantly sought inspiration. They constitute the best explanation of the battle of the Yser, and illuminate it as nothing else can do.

“It is true to say that this conception of command is one of the main points of my military principles with regard to allied armies acting together. Personally, I am convinced of its truth. It has become to me almost an article of faith. Such a conception appears to me as human as it is reasonable. The purely technical side should never be allowed by a great leader to blind him to other factors. My idea is simply this: When allied armies are under one command, categorical imperatives are useless. The commander must be able to inspire confidence and the spirit of coöperation in his followers, so that his orders may be accepted in all willingness. That must be his only method.

“It was the method I used from the very first, long before I was appointed to the Chief Command in March, 1918. As early as 1914, at the battle of the Yser, I was virtually Commander-in-Chief; for the Commander-in-Chief is he who directs the battle, and that I, in effect, did.

“As the method had excellent results, I clung to it, and when I was placed at the head of the Allied Armies, I merely developed and amplified it. With the extraordinary assortment of troops under my com-

FUNCTION OF A *GENERALISSIMO*

mand—English, Americans, Belgians, Italians and Portuguese—severity would have been useless; but under my rule of confidence and persuasion, they produced results which proved more than satisfactory."

V

FOCH AND THE AMERICAN ARMY: GRAVE DIFFERENCES WITH CLEMENCEAU

THIS conception of the Supreme Command is nowhere more lucidly shown than in the acute disagreement that arose between Foch and Clemenceau, during the summer and autumn of 1918, concerning the American Army. The facts are little known. Foch had often referred to the subject during our conversations. I questioned him about it one day, and he told me the whole affair. The details are extraordinarily interesting and significant, and show in a remarkable light the characters of Foch and Clemenceau.

"Thanks to my interpretation of the Supreme Command, I maintained continuous contact with my colleagues, and we worked together intelligently in an atmosphere of friendliness and even affection. I thereby succeeded in obtaining the utmost efforts out of the various foreign armies under my orders. The effect was remarkable in the case of the young American Army, which was excellent and full of enthusiasm but, naturally, inexperienced and immature; it had to learn

THE AMERICAN ARMY

in a few months—a few weeks even—what the rest of us had taken several years to learn. It seemed to me unjust and unreasonable not to take into account its lack of experience; I could not treat it as though it had been fighting with us for years past.

“Yet towards the end of the War, M. Clemenceau deemed that the American Army was not putting forth all possible effort. He attributed this to its commander, General Pershing. According to M. Clemenceau, the American General was seeking to constitute an autonomous army with a large and important staff, which was to act on its own account without paying sufficient attention to the operations of the other forces. M. Clemenceau upbraided me for showing him too much patience and indulgence.

“‘You will answer to France for it,’ he told me one day.

“I replied that I was ready to answer for it to anyone, and I continued, as though nothing had happened, to act upon my method, which seemed to me the only practicable one because it alone was reasonable.

“For what is the good of giving orders, when for many moral and concrete reasons they cannot be executed? We have to treat men, and especially men of a different nation, according to what they are, and not according to what we would like them to be. I

MARSHAL FOCH

therefore continued my method of patience and persuasion as opposed to severity and constraint.

"M. Clemenceau was far from being convinced. He vehemently persisted in his views. My patience with Pershing was causing, he alleged, a considerable loss of strength in the American Army. The efforts that the Americans did not put forth had to be supplied by the English and above all by the French, he said. It was his belief that as persuasion provoked no response, it was time to resort to force and energy. By this he meant that we should appeal to President Wilson over Pershing's head, and beg him to force the General to compliance or, failing that, to nominate someone else to his post. This idea had been in his head for some time.

"On October 21, he wrote me an urgent letter telling me of the cares that lay heavy on his mind. While he praised me for the victories I had just won, which placed me, he said, among the great soldiers of history, he thought that as President of Council, Minister of War, and constitutional head of the French Army he had a right to give his opinion on faulty utilization of the American troops. This resulted, he assured me, from the obstinacy of General Pershing, who had definitely obtained his own way because of my patience in dealing with him. Clemenceau finally urged me not

THE AMERICAN ARMY

to hesitate to appeal to President Wilson himself if indulgence were no longer of any avail.

"This letter was written in a beautiful style that betokened long and careful thought on the part of its writer. Volumes could not throw more light on the character and temperament of M. Clemenceau. It shows his good qualities and his faults, his ardour, his imperiousness, his impulsiveness, his irritability in the face of obstacles, his instinct to break, not to avoid them. But when obstacles arise not from men but from the force of circumstances, any efforts in that direction are not only vain but childish. One might as well join battle with the elements. Don Quixote was animated by the same feelings when he tilted against windmills.

"As I had daily dealings with the American Army, I obviously had some knowledge of its imperfections. I knew that they were rooted in its youth and inexperience of war, not in the actions or inaction of any of its leaders. Even if it were possible to change the head of an army at a moment's notice—which would be attended by huge difficulties and much inconvenience—the army itself could not be as rapidly transformed. In these circumstances, then, was it to our interests to precipitate a crisis in the American High Command, to raise an outcry, to bring Wilson himself into the matter? It seemed to me the surest way of mud-

MARSHAL FOCH

dling and spoiling everything under guise of ameliorating matters.

"Neither was it at all certain that the President would readily yield to my demand for Pershing's recall. If, in spite of such a request, Pershing were allowed to remain at his post, he would know what had occurred and be still more restive. Even assuming that he were recalled, his successor would need a long time to take up all the threads. We would then have gained nothing by the change, and probably would be in a worse plight.

"That was my considered opinion. It will be recognized, I believe, that reason, prudence and common sense were on my side. Therefore M. Clemenceau's letter, despite its urgency, did not cause me to vary my plans. Convinced as I was that my method of command, based on persuasion rather than harshness, was a good one—in fact, the only good one—I was determined to apply it to the very end.

"In my answer to M. Clemenceau, I did not follow his lead by discussing principles—by temperament and by habit I am averse to it. I immediately brought him back to the reality of the battle-field, the only thing that counts with me. Not by theoretical arguments but by a terse account of facts, I demonstrated to him that the do-or-die method was useless.

"'At the present moment,' I wrote, attacking the

THE AMERICAN ARMY

question straightway and without preamble, as I always do, ‘how are the American troops disposed on the Front?’ Then I gave a brief but detailed account, which showed that out of thirty American Divisions fit for service ten were shared among the Allied forces and twenty were under Pershing’s orders, to form an autonomous army. ‘I shall maintain those two sections as they are. I shall, of course, vary the proportions according to circumstances, adding ten or subtracting twenty as operations permit. By such an arrangement I may hope to augment the power of the Supreme Command, rather than by giving orders that they would find impossible to execute. To enforce them, experienced Commandants, Divisional Commanders and Staff Officers would be necessary. As yet, they are still in the making, and we must not deprive them of the means of completing their training.

“The present state of affairs, moreover, is one through which all untrained armies have to pass, and it considerably reduces their worth at the beginning.”

“I ended with a merited appreciation of the Army’s heroism: ‘The efforts made by the American Army are undeniable. After taking the offensive at Saint Mihiel on September 12, it made an attack in the Argonne district on September 26. Between September 26 and October 20 it lost 54,158 men, and although it is true that the Front was narrow, it made some slight

MARSHAL FOCH

gains over particularly difficult ground in the face of serious resistance from the enemy.'

"My answer, as you see, was of the simplest and most conclusive nature. After my rapid but accurate account of the facts, nothing much remained of M. Clemenceau's impassioned charge. I made him put his finger, so to speak, on the material impossibility we would encounter if my opinions were disregarded.

"The situation arose from facts against which everyone was powerless. The American Army was young and raw, and had to be treated accordingly. In any case, whatever it was, the services it had already rendered were great, and were to be still greater in the future.

"I must add this. Thanks to the plans to which I was determined to adhere, I succeeded in winning the confidence, good-will and enthusiasm of General Pershing and his subordinates, which steadily increased. In the end, they acted entirely on my instructions and did exactly what I wanted—and did it with pleasure. When the War was over I was gratified to find myself the personal friend of all the American generals, beginning with Pershing, with whom I had been in contact."

VI

THE STORY OF THE ARMISTICE

FOCH had several times mentioned the Armistice. I very much wanted to hear him deal at length and in detail with so important a subject. The occasion seemed favourable one day when the Marshal was firmly ensconced in his armchair and puffing regularly at his pipe, so I boldly switched the conversation to that subject and asked him to tell me what he really thought.

"There is no question, sir, upon which the public is worse informed. Either it has been deceived or else it is misunderstanding matters. Many people are saying that we are in our present terrible difficulties thanks to a bad armistice followed by a still worse treaty. On this assumption generals and statesmen alike were guilty, because they proved incapable of following up a victory and profiting fully by it. Why did they stop half-way? When the enemy asked for quarter, instead of granting him the lull he wanted we should have redoubled our attack and run the German Armies to earth. War has become their national industry, then why did we not lacerate their pride by making them

MARSHAL FOCH

feel their defeat? We would in this way have garnered in the whole of their material effects, which we were later at such pains to seize and then bungle the business. More important than that, we would have broken down their morale for many years afterwards, perhaps for ever. Their military chiefs would be covered with ignominy, and any desire of aggression would have been stamped out for all time.

"Those are some of the criticisms we frequently hear."

Foch, who had listened in silence, for a moment gave himself up to thought. Then his hand cut the air with his habitual gesture, that seemed to leave the field clear for discussion.

"Let us try to see clearly into all that," he began.
"Let us have a few well-defined terms.

"What is an armistice? It is the suspension of hostilities that the victor grants to the vanquished in order to avoid useless bloodshed, during which suspension the combatants discuss the peace conditions which the one can impose on the other. For war is not an end, it is only a means. It is not waged so that a nation may gain victories or tens of thousands of prisoners or hundreds of guns, but solely in order to impose its will, *its whole will*, upon its adversary.

"When, on November 11, we signed the Armistice at Rethondes, we had been gaining victories in rapid

THE ARMISTICE

succession for over two months. We might certainly have continued doing so.

"But what was the use of continuing if the enemy accepted, in the military sense of the word, all our conditions? For those conditions were such that even if he wished, he would find it literally impossible to take up arms again. The enemy was thus absolutely obliged to acquiesce in our subsequent demands.

"By that can you recognize a good armistice. It is the right and the duty of the victor to demand of the vanquished all that renders impossible any continuation of the struggle. But what advantage is there in seeking for more than that?

"The day when I first debated in my mind the terms of the Armistice, I assigned first place to a dogged holding of the Rhine line and bridge-heads. There you have the essential point. All other points are secondary. I knew that the German Army, physically and spiritually demoralized as it then was, would be incapable of putting up even a show of resistance, after being deprived of the major portion of its machine-guns, field-guns and transports, and forced to hurry to the opposite side of the river. If, when the peace terms had been decided upon, the German Government even made a show of refusing them, what would happen? We should only have to press a button and give the signal to our troops, and the Allied Armies, with full control

MARSHAL FOCH

of the Rhine and its tributaries, would hurl themselves onwards to Berlin or Munich. In a few days we could dictate whatever peace terms we wanted.

"Have subsequent events justified my forebodings? Yes, fully.

"The Allies thrashed out the question of peace terms between themselves. In my opinion the treaty was a bad one, very bad for us. It assured to us neither of the two things to which we were entitled: reparations and security. I said so to anyone who was willing to listen and to many who were not; I expressed my view in every possible way; I did not wait for the treaty to be signed as did others: I cried out upon it while negotiations were in progress.

"I did all that was humanly possible to effect a modification. I addressed three detailed and straightforward notes to the Government. I even demanded, and with a good deal of effort, obtained a hearing by the Council of Ministers called especially for the purpose. There I used the clearest of arguments; I showed, and proved to them, how dangerous; how beset with disaster was the path on which they were setting foot. They did not listen. They took no heed of my advice or of my passionate admonitions. What more could I do?

"When I was shown the Peace Treaty, which I considered totally inadequate, I said to M. Clemenceau: 'As

THE ARMISTICE

it stands, I undertake to make the Germans accept it without a moment's hesitation. Make it ten, twenty or a hundred times more rigorous, and I give you my oath that I will make them accept it as quickly. I guarantee that the Germans will sign it. They cannot avoid it.'

"In those circumstances, why rail against the Armistice? It seems to me that it fulfilled its object, which, I repeat, is to enable the victor definitely to impose his will upon the vanquished.

"And how should two or three victories more have modified those peace conditions to our advantage?

"My part in the Armistice was limited to the purely military side. Unhappily, I was not concerned with the rest.

"I knew how thorough was the rout of the German Armies. I knew that without risk of catastrophe they could not carry on the fight. I was therefore determined to impose the one necessary and sufficient condition: the occupation of the Rhine line with all its bridge-heads. If the Germans accepted it, it would be absolutely useless to go on fighting, killing hundreds and thousands of men. It was necessary to sacrifice them unhesitatingly so long as our political and military objective had not been attained. But the moment it was attained, I in my capacity of Supreme Com-

MARSHAL FOCH

mander no longer had the right to make so futile a sacrifice. Enough men had been killed without that.

“By a few new victories in Lorraine or Flanders we would, I repeat, have gained nothing more.

“There is continual mention of the offensive I was preparing in Lorraine, which was due to be launched a few days after the signing of the Armistice. Its importance has always been exaggerated. It is regarded as the irresistible blow that was to fell and administer the knock-out to the Boche. That’s nonsense. The Lorraine offensive was *not* in itself any more important than the attack then being prepared in Belgium, on the Lys. It may even be estimated as less important, for a substantial advance of our forces in Belgium would have been far more of an obstacle to the German retreat than advance in Lorraine. The Lorraine offensive is considered by itself, independently of all the others. In reality, it was only a part in a whole. Towards the end of the War, the whole of the Allied Front, from the North Sea to the Vosges, was in movement; every operation tallied with all the others, as in every well-regulated organism. Therein lay the importance of the affair; for the enemy, attacked on every flank and at judiciously selected points, would have had no respite. His reserves were melting visibly.

“So it is quite wrong to attack the Armistice. The

'THE ARMISTICE

generals and men of the Allied Armies did all that was expected of them. They fulfilled their mission with thoroughness. They left our adversary in a state that compelled him to accept anything that we might choose to inflict. Their victory was entire and unrestricted. By a few battles more or less we would have gained nothing. If that victory has not yielded all the results that we had a right to expect, the fault lies not with the military but solely with the politicians."

Foch left his chair. His words had fired him with enthusiasm, and, leaving his pipe on his desk, he bore me with him towards the map of Europe on the wall.

"Many people say, 'They ought to have crushed the German Army and dictated peace terms from Berlin.'

"But in what way, I ask you, would a peace dictated at Berlin have been better than any signed at Cologne or Mayence?

"From the military point of view, in June, 1919, when it came to imposing the peace terms upon which the Allies had with difficulty agreed, Germany was at their mercy. They could exact from her whatever they wished. The German Army no longer existed so far as they were concerned.

"Now I'll tell you of an event that, though small, is significant and more eloquent than many volumes. One of my Staff Officers at this time visited the H.Q.

MARSHAL FOCH

of a French Division holding the bridge-head at Mayence. If Germany had not signed, this division was to proceed in lorries for some two or three hundred kilometres, cut across a part of Germany and arrive nearly at the frontiers of Bohemia.

"That simple fact dispenses with long chains of reasoning. The Allied Armies could certainly not have been in a stronger position with regard to Germany if, instead of signing the Armistice on November 11, they had waited a few more weeks and borne off a few more victories. Some thousands or some tens of thousands of French, English, American and Belgian soldiers would have been killed in those few weeks without any improvement in the final result. I judged the sacrifice to be worthless, and my conscience told me that I had not the right to inflict it upon the troops I commanded. Who shall dare to blame me?

"The objection may be raised that the Armistice could and should have contained political and economical, as well as military, clauses, which would have set a seal of glory on a victory to which France, more than anyone else, had contributed. It should have laid down a certain number of conditions which would subsequently have assured our country of its essential rights: reparations and security.

"The Armistice, to put it briefly, enfolded the seeds

THE ARMISTICE

of the ensuing Peace. It needed no great wisdom to know that a peace in which there were so many participants of diverse, if not divergent, interests, would be lengthy and difficult to establish. All the more reason why its fundamentals should have been laid down with extreme care at the beginning. We ought to have decided what we wanted, defined our object and shaped the Armistice accordingly.

"If the Allied troops were to push forward immediately to the Rhine, occupy the whole of the left bank and a few bridge-heads on the right bank, and hold them as a combined security and hold on Germany, it was indispensable for France to weld the essential elements of her Rhineland policy into an orderly whole. Was it her intention to separate the Rhineland from Prussia and prevent the latter from spreading to the opposite side of the Rhine? The danger of this spreading constitutes an extremely grave menace to our safety. These were the pressing questions on which we were to settle, as soon as possible, our aims and designs. Speed in deciding was vital. Any delay, hesitation or vacillation could not but be detrimental to us. If we resolved upon demanding full possession of the military frontier on the Rhine—which at first the French plenipotentiaries did at my instigation, but later, most unhappily, they gave up the notion for the sake of a worthless pact of alliance—if

MARSHAL FOCH

such was our resolve, I say, it was necessary to pave the way for such a policy, seize firm hold of the territory, exact the immediate expulsion of all Prussian officials, etc."

VII

THE STORY OF THE ARMISTICE: THE RHINE-LAND QUESTION AND DISAGREEMENT WITH CLEMENCEAU

AS soon as I definitely felt that something had broken in the mechanism of the German Army, and that the War might well finish towards the end of 1918, earlier than was imagined, I asked myself the following question: On the day when the German Army, face to face with defeat and disaster, asks for an armistice, what military conditions are to be imposed upon it? That was the main point upon which I had to reflect and decide.

"It was on October 8, over a month before the end of the War, that I intimated to the President of Council what I believed to be the essential terms of the Armistice. As the document in question is of the highest importance, I keep a copy in my desk. Here it is. Read it."

The letter enumerated in detail the conditions to be mentioned in the Armistice.

The invaded countries (Belgium, France, Alsace-Lorraine, Luxembourg) to be evacuated within a fortnight, and their inhabitants to be repatriated.

MARSHAL FOCH

Bridge-head on the Rhine to be held by us, which secures a military base from which to attack enemy forces in the event of a break-down in peace negotiations.

The land on the left bank of the Rhine to be seized, which would serve as a pledge for security as well as for reparations; also, seizure of all the provisions and materials of war which the enemy could not remove.

All Belgian and French railway material to be restored.

"As you see, the document, despite its extreme brevity, is of capital importance. It proves that from the first day to the very end my ideas and principles regarding the paramount question of the Rhine have not changed.

"If France has a firm hold of the Rhine, she may be at rest, for she can be sure of reparations and security; without the Rhine she has neither. All that may be offered or given in exchange is valueless, illusory, empty. That is the position I took up immediately. We must have the Rhine line; we want nothing more and will take nothing less. As regards the Armistice, being first judge of the situation, I succeeded, after some difficulty, in imposing my views on the others. As regards the Peace, in spite of my vehement protests and persistent appeals, they went unheeded.

"I will tell you now of a very curious episode, little

THE RHINELAND QUESTION

known to the public. The political and diplomatic realms are in certain cases inseparable from the domain of military matters; so that my first incursion into those realms was eminently legitimate. Yet you will see that as soon as it was made I was snubbed, put in my place, and curtly advised to busy myself with my own task of conducting the armies.

"My determination to push forward the Allied Armies to the Rhine, and my resolve to accept no middle way or compromise led me to wonder what were the ideas of the French Government as to the ultimate fate of the Rhine territory. Would it be separated from France, and if so, how? Would it be made into an autonomous country, a buffer state? All this I wanted to know not from mere vain curiosity, but in order to suit the military steps shortly to be taken to the diplomatic and political measures to be taken some months later. Nothing could be more natural, more logical and more legitimate than my desire for enlightenment on those points. Here the military and political aspects of the War definitely converged. Both theoretically and practically it was impossible to keep them apart.

"So on October 16, 1918, I wrote to M. Clemenceau, President of Council and Minister of War, a letter in which I asked to be informed of the policy of the Government concerning the Rhineland.

MARSHAL FOCH

"The occupation of the Rhine, I said, will put us in possession of pledges; but will those pledges suffice to guarantee reparations? When reparations have been made, what fate is in store for the Rhineland? Will France persevere in her idea of creating a neutral, independent buffer state? Those are questions which ought to be agreed upon by all the Governments before the Armistice is signed and its terms discussed by the military.

"My common sense told me that only the advantages gained by the Armistice would be permanent; I felt that territorial concessions made by the enemy at any other time would prove unreliable.

"It comes to this; you must strike the iron while it is hot. If France intended to separate the Rhineland from Prussia, there was no time to be lost in shaping the Armistice accordingly. But what was the opinion of the Government? I suggested that the most practical course to take was for a high official in the Foreign Office to keep in close contact with me so that I should be fully enlightened on all necessary points. For the Armistice, I said, from political and diplomatic aspects as well as from the military point of view, bears within it the seeds of the ensuing Peace.

"My letter had been carefully pondered; it was eminently moderate and reasonable; but what answer did I receive from M. Clemenceau, the President of Coun-

THE RHINELAND QUESTION

cil, and his colleague for Foreign Affairs, M. Pichon? Their answer was: 'Your business is war; but everything pertaining to peace, our Rhineland policy, etc., concerns ourselves exclusively. We will not suffer you to interfere in those matters.'

"M. Clemenceau, in his letter of October 23, began by stating specifically that I was merely military advisor to the Government. Such an official, he said, was consulted only on technical matters, and the Government was free to act on his advice, to reject it, or to modify it in any way. Diplomatic and political discussions bearing on matters of pledges and the Rhineland were outside his province. He dwelt on the distinction between political and diplomatic matters and military affairs. He intimated that I should be kept informed of matters only as and when they had a military bearing. To give added weight and consequence to his missive, he enclosed a letter from M. Pichon, Minister of Foreign Affairs. The latter went still further in rebuking me. I had asked to be put in touch with a high official in his Ministry in order to be aware of the Government's intentions; this M. Pichon refused to permit. 'Only the Minister himself can give you such information,' he said, and straightway proceeded to say that the Minister would do no such thing, soldiers having nothing to do with politics and diplomacy. Not content with refusing my request, he resolved to

MARSHAL FOCH

teach me a lesson. ‘Everyone has his own task to perform,’ he ended. ‘It is advisable that the work of each be clearly defined in scope, so as to avoid any confusion of power.’”

Here Foch looked at me and faintly smiled.

“What do you think of that good advice?”

“I think, from my knowledge of Clemenceau,” I said, “that he must have taken great joy in giving it to you. The old Jacobin must have been filled with glee as he pored over his own letter and dictated that of Pichon. He must have been delighted to put a mere military man in his place, and make him feel the unquestionable supremacy of the civilian.”

“M. Clemenceau,” resumed Foch, “was from that time onward extremely jealous of his prerogatives and power. As victory drew nearer he became increasingly dictatorial, and would suffer proportionately little questioning of his views. After the victory, of course, he was still worse.”

“That reminds me, sir, of something my witty old friend, Alfred Capus, once said. Though he was extremely fond of Clemenceau, he said to me one day during the negotiations: ‘They look upon their Conference as a highly exclusive club at which they allow no guests!’”

“That is about the case,” said Foch. “You can imagine that I had no need of such a pedantic lecture

THE RHINELAND QUESTION

on constitutional law and the limitation of power—especially pedantic on the part of the Quai d' Orsay. I had simply taken my stand on the level ground of reason and common sense. Peace is the logical finish of a war, and as it was nearly upon us, I wanted to know the Government's policy on the vital question of the Rhine, so as to turn my own steps in the same direction. That was all.

"As for the notion so noisily proclaimed by M. Pichon and M. Clemenceau, that a general works on one side of a barrier and the politicians and diplomats on the other, there is nothing more false, or one can even say, more absurd. War is not a dual object, but a unity; so, for that matter, is peace. They are not divided into military and civil departments. The two aspects are closely and inseparably linked. Because the Allies did not recognize that, for years they committed a series of mistakes that considerably delayed victory. Statesman and general were acting each on his own account; they did not try to coördinate their efforts, and so they alighted upon the surest way of doing harm.

"Take, for example, the entry of Rumania into the War. During the summer of 1916, after interminable negotiations, she decided to intervene. There was no coöperation between the diplomats and the military. The former had arranged with the greatest of care and

MARSHAL FOCH

minuteness all the details of territorial distribution after the victory. That was a real case of selling your bird before catching it. You must win your victory before thinking of its spoils. On the other hand, the military preparations had been neglected and bungled. The natural consequences soon made themselves felt. A few weeks later, the army of Rumania, thrown on her own resources, was beaten, her capital and two-thirds of her territory occupied by the enemy. There was no longer any question of sharing the profits of victory, with which the diplomats had exclusively busied themselves; utter catastrophe had to be avoided, and to this the military had not given enough thought. All this happened because military and civilians had worked apart."

VIII

THE STORY OF THE ARMISTICE: DISAGREEMENT WITH THE ENGLISH: HOW FOCH IMPOSED HIS VIEWS

YOU know me well enough to be sure that I took M. Clemenceau's snub philosophically and in good part. I paid no more attention to it. But I could no longer concern myself with anything but the purely military clauses of the Armistice.

"In this connection I was to have a lively tussle with the English High Command. You say that many Frenchmen regard the clauses of the Armistice as over-indulgent to the Germans; but at the time the English, and especially the generals, thought them much too severe. They were convinced that Germany would never accept them.

"Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, when informed of the Armistice plans I had drawn up and submitted to the French Government, said very plainly that he considered my demands excessive, that the Germans would certainly not accept them, and that consequently the War might drag on all through the winter.

"I wrote to M. Clemenceau on October 18, and told him of Haig's apprehensions. The British Command-

MARSHAL FOCH

er-in-Chief, I said, believes that the German Army is still very powerful. He calculates that if the enemy retreated now and re-grouped his forces, he might delay pursuit by the Allies. He might also consolidate the defence of German territory (thanks to government by a dictator) and prolong the War indefinitely. Given these conditions, he judges it is wiser to impose the bare necessary terms, namely the evacuation of Belgium, Luxembourg and Alsace-Lorraine. These terms appear to the Field-Marshal sufficient to permit of the simultaneous invasion of the southern states and northern provinces of Germany in case of a breach of the Armistice.

"Field-Marshal Haig had just left for London, most probably to lay his opinion vehemently before his Government and win them over to it. I therefore spoke strongly to M. Clemenceau against what I deemed too timid a point of view.

"‘The military power of the Germans,’ I stated (these were my exact words), ‘is in fact so disorganized, morally and materially, that, whatever the form of her government, it will be some time before they can offer any serious resistance if we leave them no loop-hole.’

“I added: ‘Also, the mere evacuation of Belgium, Luxembourg, and Alsace-Lorraine would not give us a pledge for necessary reparations. If the Armistice were broken, we would have no means of coping with

DISAGREEMENT WITH THE ENGLISH

enemy resistance behind the Rhine, the bridges of which we should not hold.'

"I concluded by avowing my intention of holding to the conditions set forth in my previous letter.

"British opposition was soon in evidence. On October 25, I presided over a Council of War of the various Commanders-in-Chief summoned to fix the terms of the Armistice. Field-Marshal Haig, Generals Pétain and Pershing were present. The Belgian representative was unable to arrive in time. I declared the meeting open and invited the Commanders-in-Chief to put forward their opinions. Haig began:

"The British Army is tired. Its infantry alone has lost more than 50,000 men. The French Army is in a similar state. The American Army is incompletely organized. We must not, therefore, risk imposing on Germany terms she may not accept. We must be content to reoccupy Belgium and Alsace-Lorraine."

"Here I intervened.

"I merely want to examine the reasons for your opinion and the state of the German Army.

"The Germans have lost more than 150,000 men and 4,000 guns. Materially and morally, the Army is disorganized and incapable of serious resistance. Victorious armies are, of course, never in their pristine freshness, and we have passed through the worst of the fight. But we must compare the opposing armies and

MARSHAL FOCH

base our conclusions solely on that. Now that comparison is greatly in our favour. Hence it is indispensable to impose on Germany terms of far greater severity.'

"Pétain and Pershing then spoke and agreed with me, so it was decided that we should maintain my original conditions, which, with slight variations, were finally adopted."

"How do you account for the position taken up by the English, sir?"

"The error on which their proposition was based was both curious and highly significant.

"For several weeks previously, the British Army had been fighting and battering the German Armies. Its work had been admirable; enough can never be said on that score. The English fought wonderfully. They won victory after victory. At the beginning of October they had pierced the formidable Hindenburg line at its strongest points. But, strange as it may seem, they hardly knew what victories they had won. They seemed not to recognize them as such. There is a certain rigidity in the English mind that sometimes causes it to be tardy in its judgments. And so they continue to visualize the German Army as it had been before their victories.

"If we had followed their lead, we should have made the grave mistake of signing a totally inadequate

DISAGREEMENT WITH THE ENGLISH

Armistice; then Germany would have been able to resume the War had she wished. Happily, their opinion was not acted upon. As it was a military question, I was in the position to impose my plans, which were based on my doctrine of holding the Rhine line and no less.

"Anyhow, Field-Marshal Haig did not greatly press the point, neither did his Government. They speedily accepted my intentions, and the Armistice in its essential clauses was approximately what I had wished.

"That proves, I may say in passing, that it is quite possible to oppose the English in the gravest matters and yet induce them to yield. It is important, however, to give full consideration to your ground of resistance, to know exactly what you want, and take a firm stand; then let your British opponent have a brief but full account of your reasons, and make him feel that you will not recede one inch.

"If peace negotiations had been conducted on similar lines, it would have been possible to do what was incumbent upon us. Instead of dispersing our efforts, we should have clung to two or three essential points and carried them. We should have insisted upon priority of reparations for the devastated areas, and the military frontier of the Rhine. When the English make mistakes, as sometimes happens, they do so thoroughly. But to counterbalance their tenacity and ob-

MARSHAL FOCH

stinality, they are full of good sense and uprightness. They give you a hearing, and if your reasons strike them as good, they allow themselves to be convinced.

“And now we will judge the Armistice according to its fruits. That is the only equitable way of passing judgment upon trees or anything else. What were those fruits?

“As in two weeks the Allied forces had forced their way to the Rhine and beyond, Germany was at their mercy; she was disarmed, incapable of even a show of resistance. If the *Reich* Government, whether monarchical or republican in its constitution, refused the treaty forced on it by the Allies, I had only to give an order and press a button, and our troops would push forward. In a few days they would over-run the whole of Germany and make a bloodless capture of Berlin and Munich. That is a salient fact and is beyond dispute.

“So, from the military point of view—which in an armistice is of primary importance—we can truly say that we derived therefrom all that could be expected. It placed Germany in such a position that she was obliged to accede to all demands made by the Allies. If these demands were from our point of view, inadequate, unstable and ill-coördinated, the fault lies neither with the Armistice nor with those who laid down its conditions.”

IX

ACCORDING TO FOCH, THE WAR COULD HAVE BEEN WON A YEAR EARLIER

FOCH had many times told me, while dealing with military operations and peace negotiations, that the Allies could have ended the War in 1917, more than a year before their final victory. Such a declaration, coming from a man who never spoke without weighing his words, had made a deep impression on me.

It was certainly conducive to hard thinking. The gain of a year could have made so much difference! We should eventually have been less impoverished. It would have brought many other advantages in its train. All the hard, complicated problems of diplomacy and economics by which we were beset would have been greatly simplified. And, more important than all else, hundreds of thousands of precious lives would have been saved from the fate to which only too many had already been sacrificed.

As the War dragged on, it aggravated the economic and financial crisis which will affect us for many years to come. It may be said without exaggeration that the

MARSHAL FOCH

last year of the War alone did more to disorganize France and Europe generally than the first three years combined. The belligerents were fighting on a hill, and as they neared the foot their downward rush increased in speed.

Motus in fine velocior.

Also, a victory won in 1917 would have been gained by England, Italy, Belgium and ourselves. We should not have required American intervention. This certainly was of great help and indispensable to our final victory; but because of it we had to bear with the cloudy notions of President Wilson when peace was made. The Peace of 1918 was largely American; in 1917, it would have been European in character. In the latter case, we should have had to deal with the vital questions of reparations and security with England alone, which would have made our task considerably lighter.

At that time, Russia was still in existence. A speedier victory might have done something to stay the rot of her decay; for it was primarily the continuance of the War that was Russia's death-warrant. Her organization was too primitive to permit of prolonged hostilities, especially after the revolution of March, 1917, by which Tsarism was finally crushed. The long duration of the War provided Lenin and the Bolsheviks

THE WAR WON A YEAR EARLIER

viks with their most potent arguments. They turned them to the best advantage, and a few months later were the masters of Russia.

The whole world, as well as France, might have reaped these advantages, had we gained one year. And Foch, speaking as though it were the most natural thing in the world, asserted that such a gain had been possible! How could one help wondering over such a thing? I could not; and so one day I asked him point-blank whether he really thought that the Allies could have beaten the Germans in 1917.

"Most certainly," he immediately replied. "I had been of that opinion for some time. Since reading the Memoirs of the German generals, particularly those of Ludendorff, my conviction has been still stronger. In 1919, as we were returning together from Lorraine, I said so to President Poincaré. Since then I have been continually receiving fresh confirmation of my view.

"Towards the end of 1916 and the beginning of 1917, Germany was at the end of her tether. A well-planned series of man uvres would have overthrown her completely. Although the battle of the Somme was undertaken with the relatively small force of fifteen or sixteen divisions, and we were consequently obliged to narrow down the ground of attack, we had inflicted severe losses on the enemy and precipitated his reserves into the field. Then was the moment to embark

MARSHAL FOCH

upon a series of operations that, if well coördinated, would have destroyed the remainder of his reserves and brought about decisive results. We should have given him no respite and allowed no interval to occur between attacks. The means then at our disposal were certainly not as numerous as they were the following year; but with careful management they would have been sufficient. The Russian Front was still intact, which obliged Germany to station a considerable force before it. That was an essential point.

"The changes that took place at this time in the French High Command were extremely unfortunate. Inevitably there followed modifications and delays in the plans for the offensive. Of course, any delay was a source of immediate benefit to the enemy, for he was thus enabled to regroup his forces and remedy his deficiencies.

"Immediate plans for a series of operations on a large scale were necessary. They should have been constructed with the greatest care, in outline and details alike. The plan of offensive actually adopted was far too simple and rudimentary. It consisted of taking the bull by the horns, which is not always the best way of mastering it."

Foch spoke very slowly.

"We were to attack the hardest point of the Front, the heights of Laon. More serious than that was the

THE WAR WON A YEAR EARLIER

fact that all attention was centred on the use to be made of the victory when it was won—that is to say, our plans when the line was broken. By that method we assumed the problem to be solved, placed the cart before the horse and meditated on the second act instead of concentrating on the first.

“We did not break the line. The obstacles in our path were too great and too numerous. Our preparations were insufficient, the ground was particularly difficult and the weather very bad. Most non-human factors seemed in league against us.

“People often imagine that victory is a simple matter. They could not make a greater mistake. It is the result of many conditions; the duty of a chief is to assemble them and combine as many as possible, which means that he reduces chance to a minimum. See how we managed things in 1918, when, having repulsed all Ludendorff’s attacks, we decided to take the offensive. Our attacks were to follow each other in a rapid succession, an almost continuous stream; do you think that the manner of those attacks was easily and lightly settled? As a matter of fact, we pondered over it for a long time, prepared it with great care and weighed all its advantages, the foremost of which was a judiciously chosen scene of operations.

“Take the first of our counter-offensives, the Mangin-Degoutte attack launched on July 18, 1918. If you look

MARSHAL FOCH

at the map, you will observe that the left flank of our armies touched the Aisne; we were thus strongly covered at that point by the river, which constituted a serious hindrance to our enemies. In this way I could not be counter-attacked from that side. I had avoided the extremely embarrassing pockets into which Ludendorff unwisely thrust his men.

“And now take the second, which was begun on August 8, and led by Débeny and the English. You will see that they received substantial protection from the Somme. Again there was no possibility of surprise on our flanks in case I had to call a halt, for all emergencies had to be foreseen.

“Plans of attack must be arranged with attention to detail and a minimum opening for chance. They must be polished, re-polished, and revised. Then they must be put into execution; and here the difficulty begins. The fulfilment of plans needs, above all, knowledge of men and of life. You must know what you can ask from each of your colleagues; your knowledge must be based on the character and temperament of each, and you must know how to make your request. If generals are addressed like schoolboys, they become resitive and lacking in interest, and your plans are not ultimately accomplished. That is your principal obstacle. You must see them continually, and put heart into them.

THE WAR WON A YEAR EARLIER

“On July 24, 1918, scarcely a week after the repulse of the last German offensive, I invited all the Commanders-in-Chief to my H.Q. at Bombon. I unfolded to them my whole plan, complete with the immediate attacks and the later ones. When they saw designs on so large a scale, and discovered vast horizons and ambitions still more vast, some of them were amazed. They were near to raising their hands to Heaven and crying: ‘It is impossible! Our armies are too exhausted!’

“‘Take this plan with you. Study it for forty-eight hours and then tell me what you think of it,’ I said.

“They took it away and studied it. What alterations they made were very minor ones. They not only accepted it, but also carried it out—which is very much more important.

“I remember what Fayolle used to say during the summer of 1918, after each of our victorious offensives. Fayolle is one of my old friends and was then in command of one of our army-groups. As soon as he saw me, he would rub his hands with satisfaction and say: ‘Ah, now I hope we shall have a breathing-space!’

“‘You are greatly mistaken,’ I would tell him. ‘We are not going to stop to breathe; we shall, on the contrary, work harder than ever and redouble our efforts to the very end.’

MARSHAL FOCH

"He looked at me in surprise to see if I were in earnest.

"‘But my men are dropping with fatigue,’ he began. ‘They have been fighting for months and simply cannot go on.’

“‘The Germans are dropping with still more fatigue,’ I told him. ‘You can’t imagine what a state they are in.’ And I then explained to him what I was going to do, and why. I easily managed to convince him.

“Handling men is by far the most delicate part of a *generalissimo’s* work. The sway you have over them does not come from a scrap of paper, a title or rank. It is a living, human thing. The question is one of mental and spiritual strength, that is all.”

The cleverest of men are not exempt from what may be called a professional deformation. If they have been for many years in a calling or profession, in all but the rarest cases they show signs of it. In the speech and whole appearance of a great general, barrister, doctor or statesman, you will nearly always find the distinguishing mark of his life-work.

Particularly is this the case with military men. I have known many soldiers of all countries: Russians whom I met during the wars in Manchuria and in the last War, Englishmen and, of course, Frenchmen. Foch was one of those rare beings in whom the professional blemish was not apparent. I might almost

THE WAR WON A YEAR EARLIER

say he was unique in this respect. He was a great soldier and a great civilian. That was, in my opinion, one of the fundamental traits of his character. When he took the trouble to explain the higher principles of strategy, they seemed the essence of simplicity. Can anything seem simpler than to place one of your wings alongside a river so that the enemy cannot make a flank-attack? A child could understand the precaution. Yet it is obvious that it cannot be so simple, since Ludendorff, who was no fool, did not think of it. It is a case of Columbus and the egg.

On several occasions Foch repeatedly reaffirmed his belief that the Allies could have brought the War to a successful finish in 1917.

"To bring it about, we should, first and foremost, have allowed the enemy no respite on the Western Front. Actually, he was granted a breathing-space of considerable length. Several months elapsed between the end of the battle of the Somme and the beginning of the April offensive. The lull allowed him to rearrange his forces and take vigorous, almost despairing measures to remedy his losses, which towards the end of 1916 left him in a critical state; he could switch his divisions to and from the Eastern and Western Fronts. An offensive on a large scale, launched at the beginning of 1917, would have prevented such expedients; above all, it would have prevented him from quietly

MARSHAL FOCH

concentrating and undisturbedly proceeding to a substantial reduction of his Western Front. By this means and by retiring to the Hindenburg line, he effected considerable economy in his forces.

"To what can we attribute a delay so beneficial to the enemy and so dire for the Allies?

"In the first place, to the change of the French Commander-in-Chief, which took place at the end of 1916. It was a disastrous change. The plan made by Joffre in November, 1916, consisted of a concerted offensive, to be made in conjunction with the English at the beginning of February, 1917. And the shortening of the German line dates from the middle of March, 1917. So the Joffre offensive, had it been accomplished according to plan and to date, would have surprised the Germans before their line was shortened, at the very time when they were changing their position."

"I have often heard the delay deplored by my old chief, General Humbert, whom I liked as much as I admired. He bemoaned, as you do, sir, the postponement of our offensive which allowed the enemy to shorten his line unmolested. 'If only we had not waited, but attacked them in February or March, we should have been on the Germans just when they were ready to decamp,' he used to say. 'That would have been ideal for the success of our enterprise.'"

"Besides the delay," continued Foch, "the nomina-

THE WAR WON A YEAR EARLIER

tion of a new Commander-in-Chief brought about an actual change in the plans that proved far from happy. They were now much too simple and superficial. A brutal massed attack was to make a breach at the most difficult point of the front. Previous experience condemned in advance any such attempt; and it proved as unsuccessful as the efforts of the Germans in the following year. So long as the enemy has reserves, you do not benefit by breaking his front line, even when the attack is, from the tactical point of view, as sudden and as complete as possible. (This was the case in the German offensives of 1918, especially in that of the Chemin-des-Dames.) The troops enclosed in the pocket thus made are soon obliged to stop. As they advance, they find it more and more difficult to obtain supplies, and then they come face to face with the fresh divisions that the enemy has had time to bring; hence they are soon checked. Pockets thus made vary in depth, but the final result is always the same. It is all much too simple. There is no real art in it. Offensives must be planned with rather more care. I say 'offensives' on purpose, for one is not enough. There must be a series, the items of which dovetail into each other with one object, namely, to call into play, and finally to destroy, the enemy's reserves. As that object is neared, so the results of each offensive become more substantial. The combatants are on an inclined

MARSHAL FOCH

plane, and progress means incessant increase of speed.

"A German general has written a thick book called *The War of Lost Opportunities*. It would be wrong to believe that the Germans were the only ones to miss opportunities; the Allies, on their side, lost many fine chances.

"During the latter half of 1916, many factors went to create magnificent possibilities of action that could and should have been much more fully exploited—the open check of the Germans at Verdun, the Franco-British offensive on the Somme that, despite its inadequate supply of troops, gave highly satisfactory results, and above all, Rumania's declaration of war. Had Rumania been better prepared from the military standpoint, she would have effected important action in the East, with, perhaps, decisive results. Unfortunately, the Rumanian intervention was as badly prepared as it could be. It is more accurate to say that it was totally unprepared. Collaboration with the Russian Armies, a vital point, was not arranged as it should have been.

"For four weary months, then, the German Army was absolutely unmolested on the Western Front; this happened just when the Germans were at a critical moment for lack of men and munitions.

"It may be said that it is an easy matter to raise objections after the events have occurred. Yet at the time the Allies could not but be aware of the situation.

THE WAR WON A YEAR EARLIER

The objection is pointless, for the Allies, if they had used their wits, would have seen that the German Army had been making superhuman efforts during the whole of 1916. It could do no more. The battles of Verdun and the Somme, those on the Western Front at the time of the Broussilof offensive and at the intervention of Rumania, etc.—all this fighting had necessarily exhausted and thinned out the German Divisions. Wisdom and common sense alike counselled the utmost rapidity of action, with whatever forces were at our disposal, on the Western Front.

“Unhappily, at this time the Allied Governments, and especially ours, showed signs of weakness and inexplicable hesitancy, due solely to political reasons. Several months were lost; the delay, besides preventing us from winning the War a year earlier—a matter of vital importance to us—made us run the risk of losing it altogether. For in the meantime the Russian Front collapsed, which, had it not been largely compensated by the American intervention, would have given the victory to the Germans.”

X

FOCH ON JOFFRE: UNPUBLISHED LETTERS WRITTEN DURING THE BATTLE OF THE YSER

WHENEVER the name of Joffre occurred in our conversations, Foch invariably spoke of his old chief and war-comrade with lively affection and great admiration.

"The outstanding trait in his character," he said to me one day, "is a certainty of judgment and a level-headedness that amounts to genius. He knows how to make his associates work well, which is the hall-mark of a real leader. If you go to see him, you will find him sitting at an empty table. A Staff Officer may come and give him a paper. He will read it carefully, examine it, reflect and give his orders accordingly.

"We used to call him the life-buoy, the thing that wind and waves cannot harm. What a life-buoy he was, and still is! Events are powerless against him. He is an admirable force in himself. At the most difficult of times, he could always go to bed and to sleep, and wake up at the same time. When everyone else is anxious and depressed, he makes his decisions with perfect sangfroid. That happened during the battle of

FOCH ON JOFFRE

the Marne. The battle was his work, and victory was directly due to him, since he was in command. All the discussion raised on the point is mere childishness.

“He understood from the very first engagements that the offensive had begun badly, and that the frontier battle was lost. He saw that it was necessary to have more space in order to rearrange his lines. He placed them in correct positions, recalled a hundred generals, and appointed their successors with marvellous insight. His choice was faultless. He then waited the necessary interval. When Galliéni suggested that the time for attack had come, Joffre, who had contemplated a further withdrawal, acceded to his reasons. He threw all his forces into a decisive battle, and won it.

“When I was informed, at the end of the battle, that the Germans were in flight, I was astonished, for in war you never know what exactly is happening in the enemy’s lines.

“A few days before the Marne, at the end of August, 1914, Joffre sent me an urgent message to go to his G.H.Q. He was going to give me the command of a new army, which he proposed to constitute between the armies of Langle de Cary and Franchet d’Esperey. I got into a car and started at once. When I arrived I was immediately shown into his room. I found him wonderfully calm and sure of himself, imperturbably receiving news from the Front and giving his orders.

MARSHAL FOCH

I confess to many gloomy thoughts during my journey from Lorraine, but I was greatly heartened by the calmness and general tranquillity at G.H.Q., as evinced by the Commander-in-Chief and his Staff. M. Millerand, the new Minister of War, had visited Joffre the previous evening. Joffre told me of their interview, and gave me the room where the Minister had slept for the night. Next day, Joffre saw me again to give me detailed instructions.

"When I left him I was full of confidence. He always had that effect on his visitors. We can never be grateful enough for the huge services he rendered at that time. If we had had a chief of a more nervous and impressionable disposition, the course of events might have been different."

"I remember, sir, when you visited the Front with Marshal Joffre, about two weeks after the battle of the Marne. Our Army Corps was on the outskirts of Rheims, where our lines were situated. One afternoon, when I was at Mombre with my chief, General Humbert, one of our comrades signalled a powerful limousine on its way to the camp. A few moments later, you arrived arm-in-arm with Marshal Joffre, apparently the best friends in the world."

"We have always felt the utmost confidence in each other. There have never been misunderstandings in our work together. Shortly after the visit to which

FOCH ON JOFFRE

you have just referred, Joffre gave me the highest rank after his own, that of Chief of Staff to the Commander-in-Chief, and sent me North to coördinate the rather scattered efforts of the English, Belgians and French. I set off on my difficult mission with his entire confidence. From that time I maintained continuous contact with him. I often wrote to him personally, whenever, in fact, something important had happened. My letters were mid-way between official correspondence and personal screeds. I will let you read them one day. Nothing could show more clearly the exact nature of our collaboration."

A few days afterwards, in effect, the Marshall honoured me by showing me the fine series of letters that passed between them. I read them attentively, with a strong feeling of admiration, and respect almost amounting to awe. They dealt only with the War and the Service, but occasionally the frank thoughts of an impulsive nature pierced through the cold phrases proper in a subordinate writing to his superior. It is to be hoped that these strange and sometimes touching letters will one day be published. They are a tribute to Foch, who wrote them, and to Joffre, to whom they were addressed. They raise both above the ordinary run of men. They are worthy of a place in history, and that place they will surely have.

In form they are swift, staccato, nervous, vibrant.

MARSHAL FOCH

Short, dry phrases fly straight to the target and say all that is necessary. Foch wrote exactly as he spoke.

Here is a letter that Foch wrote to Joffre from his quarters at Doullens, on October 13:

SIR,

At present we are attacking Lille with the left of our 10th Army, two English Army Corps, two divisions of English cavalry.

I have hopes from the English offensive. It is determined and slow, as it usually is; but the Field-Marshal is resolved upon engaging the enemy seriously. He will get results, but will they be decisive? It is doubtful. Anvers finished a few days too soon. . . .

To get decisive results, it may be necessary to support our flank movement with one or more central attacks in a concentrated effort to break the enemy's line. . . .

This arrangement would have the advantage of forcing situations to arise, instead of waiting for them to form. It would also develop several simultaneous lines of attack without using any more ammunition. If you concur in these views, I ask you to let me know at once, as the time needed for preparation is always rather long. My relations with the English Army are extremely cordial, and the atmosphere is one of the utmost reciprocal confidence. I am doing all that is possible to maintain this state of things. If that were the only effect of my presence here in the North, I think the result would still be a considerable one.

FOCH ON JOFFRE

The Field-Marshal is very anxious to go to Brussels. I am not keeping him back. I shall do my best to help him. He highly appreciates your intervention to obtain for him command over all the English troops landed.

Brécard [a French Liaison Officer attached to the Belgian Army] had just joined us. If, with his help and a little good fortune, we succeed during the next few days in improving the tone, confidence and appearance of the Belgian Army, and if it proves sufficient to cover our left flank, I shall not despair of it now or as to the future.

I am advising the Governor of Dunkerque not only to maintain the town in a state of defence, but also to have earth works dug so as completely to protect it from attack. . . .

I particularly wanted to quote this letter because it is wonderfully typical of the man. Napoleon wrote with similar fire and enthusiasm. It might be slipped into one of the forty volumes of his correspondence; it would certainly not be out of place. Briefly and in excellent, thoroughbred, nervous French, Foch spoke his thoughts. The clear, concise phrases and abbreviated sentences come naturally to his pen. Never were there complaints or recriminations regarding his associates, English or Belgian. They did all they could; it was his business to extract all possible benefit from

MARSHAL FOCH

their efforts. He succeeded. Thanks to him, the badly-matched team collaborated as well as was possible. The future Supreme Chief of the Allied Armies was already at work on the hard task to be allotted to him in the last year of the war.

Read what Foch wrote to Joffre a few days later, after a visit to the front on an inspection of the Belgian Army:

. . . I went to Dunkerque. I saw the Governor. He assured me that the place is well defended, and not too near danger. I believe him. Flooding with fresh water has been effected and sea-water will shortly be used also. The arrangements for Belgian refugees are proceeding smoothly at present. It is the same at Calais. From there I went to Furnes. The Belgian Army is encamped on the line of the Yser with orders to dig itself in and use all its energy in resisting the enemy. The King and the President of Council appeared resolved upon putting this into practice. The former is a man of great honesty and worthy intentions, the latter, a man well able to govern strongly. They understand that Belgium's very existence is now at stake. They have taken rigorous measures in respect of weak or incompetent generals, and will continue so to do. Given these conditions, I believe that they will be successful, and that the Belgian Army, fresh and intact, will hold its position, especially as the

FOCH ON JOFFRE

Germans do not seem likely to make an attack for some days yet. It is in a strong state of organization.

Always the same confidence, alacrity, almost gladness are manifest. One man of action is speaking to another, hence no useless phrases, but facts and concise information; everything else is sternly eliminated. Notice how Foch appreciates the nobility and uprightness of the King of the Belgians. "A man of great honesty and worthy intentions." He knew of no higher praise.

When the battle of Ypres began, and the Germans concentrated the whole of their strength on trying to break our lines, Foch still wrote with the same confidence and enthusiasm. The following extract is from a letter written on November 19; in it Foch gives the Commander-in-Chief a summary of all events up to that date, showing great perspicacity in his views. He also ventures on a few notes as to future operations. It may be noted that henceforth he gives pride of place to the material side of matters.

SIR,

The situation is still the same. We are no longer seriously attacked. We are reconstituting our strength.

After surveying the situation here and on the Russian Front, I sum it all up as follows: The basic German

MARSHAL FOCH

plan was to destroy its enemy on the West by forcing its left wing from the Yser to the sea, before turning upon its enemy in the East, the Russian Army. The first part of the programme broke down. The Germans could neither turn our left wing nor destroy us. In fact, we are in a perfect physical and moral condition to attack them.

After a three months' campaign, they have attained only to painful impotence in the West. In the East all their work is before them, and their army is greatly weakened. Whatever may be their treatment of the Eastern question—and there are several possible courses to follow—they cannot avoid withdrawing troops from the Western Front, and must therefore shorten their line. The first strong line they will put up against us will probably lie between Strasburg, Brussels, and Antwerp, via Metz, the Meuse in the Mézières region, and Namur.

1. Nature of the War.

Before coming upon it, we shall doubtless have to attack other defensive lines. In any case, warfare against fortified positions will increasingly be our lot. The organization of such a war should, it seems to me, receive increasing attention from us. It necessitates abundant siege artillery with enough munition to make it adequate in the storming of its object. It is obvious that different accoutrement is required against earthworks and concrete. It is equally obvious

FOCH ON JOFFRE

that in trench warfare the programme must include bomb-throwing, therefore we must provide trench mortars or other guns, and plenty of ammunition, etc. . . .

Besides this kind of artillery, we must be provided with a strongly organized body of engineers for making trenches and laying mines. I know less about this department, but a certain idea persists in my head. Since artesian wells and the subterranean work involved in the Paris underground railway (Berlier tubes) have there not been invented speedier mechanical means by which tunnels can be dug beneath the enemy's lines—tunnels that will admit the introduction of quantities of explosive?

2. As for the direction to be given to our attacks, what I say is this: Down to Waterloo, the fate of Europe has always been settled in Belgium. It seems difficult to leave the field. We can be sure of English and Belgian collaboration if we drag them there. If we leave them in any other place, they may produce no results. As far as the Meuse, there are no serious obstacles. The German defensive organization in that region being of more recent date than the others, it may be weaker.

In consideration of all these factors, I conclude that a strong attack is necessary in the North, along the Anvers-Namur line, which might be completed by temporary fortifications around Brussels. Then we could aim at a line along the Meuse from Namur to

MARSHAL FOCH

Liège. There our offensive would certainly meet with strong resistance. The same would occur along the Meuse line from Namur to Mézières, Sedan, Mouzon. . . . It seems that we could triumph over that resistance only by a manœuvre along the right bank, starting from Verdun and its neighbourhood. . . .

It must be noted that from November, 1914, onward, that is to say, three months after the beginning of hostilities, Foch gives pride of place to equipment. He was not long in profiting by experience. He saw that for the trench-warfare then in preparation we should have more and more need of ammunition, guns, and many other kinds of apparatus. He also analyzes with clearness and perfect objectivity of judgment the position of the German Armies. He saw through their plans. As their first engagements were of critical import to them, and they failed, the only chance of German success lay in the hope that the Allies would commit inexcusable errors. Hence Foch was full of confidence. Scarcely had he won a defensive battle before the spirit of attack by which he was animated, irresistibly manifested itself. He was already contemplating operations on a grand scale. He put the idea and his plans before his chief.

On January 1, 1915, Foch began a letter to Joffre as follows:

FOCH ON JOFFRE

SIR,

Allow me to begin my letter with my New Year wishes. I trust that your health will continue in its present good state and leave you at liberty to perform your hard task. May victory crown the efforts you maintain and guide with such success! . . .

Thus, in the brief, sober words customary in an un-effusive man, Foch expressed his admiration and affection for Joffre. Joffre had the same feelings with regard to Foch. Each felt towards the other unbounded trust and esteem. On such a foundation of rock did their collaboration repose.

When a human being is given an extraordinarily hard task beset with all kinds of obstacles, and he meets with constant success; when he skims with apparent ease over difficult places—we are somewhat inclined to think that nothing could be more natural. We unconsciously say to ourselves that the difficulties could not have been so difficult to surmount since they were in fact overcome. That is rather the case with Foch. That is what we think about his coördination of the Allies' efforts: of the English and Belgians in 1914, of the English, Belgians, Italians, Portuguese, Americans, etc., in 1918. But the word "coördination" when stripped of its ceremonial trappings, is seen really to mean "superintendence." In the last phase of the War,

MARSHAL FOCH

he was appointed to the Supreme Command. When it began, he had no such rank and no clearly defined mission. Yet his actions, his influence and guidance in the two cases differed very slightly. There is no better confirmation of Foch's ideas on the Supreme Command. Throughout the battle of the Yser, although he had no rights in the matter, he gave not only advice, but also guidance and instructions, to the English and Belgians. His counsel was followed; his orders were executed. That is the difficult, and wonderful, part of the affair. Such a thing can be explained only by the all-powerful action of his intellectual and spiritual forces, by a mysterious emanation, as it were, that affected all who came into contact with him; the gift of leadership. Without it there can be no great soldier, and no great statesman. Napoleon was wonderfully gifted with this magnetism. He made it felt as early as at the siege of Toulon, and subsequently during his immortal Italian campaign. His extraordinary career was the direct result of that gift.

If the urgent sway of the great leader be analyzed, the first thing to be noticed is his unquestioned and unquestionable superiority. Obedience, when, as here, it is unforced, is a homage. If the English and Belgians were led by Foch, it is because they knew, having seen his work, that his advice, his orders, were incontestably the best. The great leader immediately convinces his

FOCH ON JOFFRE

subordinates that he thoroughly knows the technique of his calling or art in all its intricacies. They bow before his mind and character. They know, or rather they feel, that in the most critical moments he will never forsake them, because he could never forsake himself.

In order to understand the difficulties Foch had to overcome in 1914, as in 1918, in his dealings with the Allied High Commands, one has only to reflect on the friction so often manifested in analogous circumstances. Military history teems with examples. Think of the violent disagreement between Field-Marshal French and his colleague, Lanrezac, which was partly responsible for the recall of the latter. Never, during the whole of Foch's command—and no one can know what his difficulties were—was there the slightest dispute. All the wheels of the vast machine rolled smoothly and soundlessly.

As to the tact and flexibility Foch had constantly to display, the letter he wrote to Joffre on January 5, 1915, is more eloquent than pages of commentary. The question had arisen of changing Field-Marshal French's Chief of Staff, General Murray; the change seems to have been desirable and in any case was ardently desired by the French. It was an extremely delicate matter, and Foch treated it with the greatest caution. He wrote:

MARSHAL FOCH

SIR,

. . . My telegram in cipher dispatched to-day gave you a brief account of my knowledge of Field-Marshal French's intentions, with regard to a prospective change in his Chief of Staff. Whether he has asked to keep him I do not know; I do not think so. But he may have abstained from asking for his recall, he may even have reacted against some of our manœuvres for having him recalled. For I know that when he learnt of the steps we had taken he said that in those circumstances he could do nothing.

English pride demands that Murray stay where he is. Anyhow, Lord Kitchener and Mr. Asquith would not hear of General Wilson as his successor; Mr. Asquith because Wilson showed himself distinctly Orangist at the time of the Irish crisis and, according to Mr. Asquith, endangered his Cabinet; Lord Kitchener, perhaps on Mr. Asquith's account, also because he dislikes Wilson, and possibly because he wants to put the Field-Marshal in an awkward position. Wilson, who is an honest man, said to the Field-Marshal: "It does not matter about me. They need not ask for me. But Murray must go. Demand his recall and replace him with a man of your own choice. I will smooth matters over with Murray."

And so far as I know, there the matter stands.

When Murray is recalled and Wilson has gained people's confidence, I believe that we shall be able to

FOCH ON JOFFRE

progress; it seems in our interest to leave the affair at that. We might waste time and energy otherwise. The Field-Marshal is asking why we cannot busy ourselves with our own affairs and leave his alone. . . .

In a letter written a few days later:

The Field-Marshal came to see me this morning to tell me of some changes in his staff. General Murray is leaving the English Army, ostensibly because of his health. It might be advisable to make another distribution of medals among the English generals. The Field-Marshal wished to remind me of it. Murray is replaced by General Robertson, a good choice in default of Wilson. Wilson remains at the head of Anglo-French relations. His rank has not been increased, but his work is growing more important, and that is the chief thing. . . .

This letter, with all the frankness and plain-speaking that Foch never forsook, shows that although he retained his determination and even intransigence over essential questions, he could act with circumspection in secondary matters—especially in those which might have disagreeable effects on English pride and susceptibility. He was a keen psychologist and had marvellous insight into men; he distinguished with perfect lucidity between the various motives of Field-Marshal French. He was careful not to arouse his temper,

MARSHAL FOCH

which would certainly have happened had the French appeared to meddle in questions of command and organization outside their province.

It was absolutely indispensable for the Staffs of French and Foch to work together in harmony, if good results were to be obtained. On French's Staff was one man who had gained the full confidence of Foch: General Wilson. At a first glance, Foch discerned his remarkable qualities. The two men understood each other wonderfully well. Their friendship, trust and affection increased as the War went on, and continued afterwards. I remember seeing them together at the Spa Conference in 1920. Nothing could have been more touching than their friendship. Foch would, of course, have liked Wilson to be nominated Chief of Staff; it would have been the ideal solution for him and for everyone else. But since it was impossible for the moment, it was useless to run after chimeras. The essential point was for Wilson to remain on French's Staff in his important position; everything else was of minor interest. Above all, friction with the English had to be avoided. And in this respect, as well as with regard to the Americans, Foch succeeded admirably.

XI

FOCH ON LUDENDORFF: WHY THE LATTER WAS BEATEN

I HAVE just finished reading the Memoirs of Hindenburg and Ludendorff," said Foch. "I was greatly, sometimes passionately, interested. I already had a fairly clear idea of Ludendorff from his behaviour during the War, but his book has made it still clearer."

"What picture have you formed of your chief opponent in the War?" I asked him.

Foch thought for a moment, and then replied:

"What is Ludendorff, in reality and as he appears in his book? He was an excellent Staff Officer, nothing more nor less. He knew his business thoroughly. He was a professional of the Frederick II type, that considers war, from the point of view of the Prussian Army, as a purely mechanical exercise. He was good at organizing and manipulating an army; but he understood nothing of the character of a national war, which brings into play the greatest interest of a country, its very existence. In such a war spiritual forces and patriotism are predominant. Spiritual forces were absent from the German Armies of 1918; without them the troops were bodies without souls.

MARSHAL FOCH

"His lack of understanding is nowhere more strangely or more significantly shown than in the reiterated appeals made by Ludendorff to his Government during the summer and autumn of 1918. He heaped it with abuse, he showered recriminations on it, and persistently demanded more soldiers and more discipline; he could not recognize the Government's inability to give him what he wanted. The country was passing through a crisis, the people were apathetic, discouragement was general and rapidly increasing. The soldiers and the people at home had had enough of war. In those circumstances, what could he and his fellow-officers do? He was a typical Prussian officer, and had all the typical good and bad qualities. He was merely a machine for leading soldiers, he lacked the inner flame of Blücher, York and their companions. He was born a century too late; he should have lived under Frederick II. In the chain of Prussian fighters, he was a link in the wrong place. The Prussian Army has no ideals, no true spiritual strength; neither has the whole nation. All they have is gross materialism.

"We saw the worth of Kaiser-worship when the Emperor collapsed and took to shameful flight, leaving his G.H.Q. and Army in confusion and defeat. The German soul has a place for the glorification of brute force, for the notion of war as a colossal looting campaign. That is all it holds. It is not much.

FOCH ON LUDENDORFF

“The military machine was admirably assembled too, and so long as it functioned, all went well. But with the first ominous cracks, catastrophe was at hand. The Germans were then incapable of putting up a fight. In vain did Ludendorff—who had no real understanding—multiply his appeals and criticisms, urge the Government to organize a mass rising, command them to suppress all peace manifestations without pity. Such demands, which fill the last pages of his Memoirs, are proof of great naïveté, a total lack of insight and political sense. The real state and mentality of his people eluded him. He could not grasp why the spring had broken. He could not see that the German Government had nothing with which to embark upon a policy of suppression.

“When Napoleon, in 1814, was in similar plight, he evinced somewhat more insight. A few days after the battle of Laon, Sebastiani advised him to decree a mass rising such as saved France in 1793. Napoleon replied that the France of 1814 had nothing in common with the France of 1793. ‘Why are you talking about a mass rising in a country where Revolution beat down the priests and nobles and I myself have beaten down the Revolution?’ That was the answer of a clear-seeing man with a grasp on the situation. The mass rising impossible in France occurred on the Prussian side.

MARSHAL FOCH

Justice was to take its course throughout the cycle of the ages. Valmy had come again, 1792 and 1793 were turned against us.

"Isn't it curious, after an interval of a century, to see moral strength, idealism, all that is finest in man bring a people to arms and lead nations irresistibly through war to victory? What is that invincible force? It is, fundamentally, the absolute certainty that one is defending a just and sacred cause. In execution this leads to an energy aroused and maintained by a common desire for justice and freedom. For interior fire, patriotism, enthusiasm and confidence did exist in 1918; but not on the side of the Germans. The French, English, Americans and Belgians redoubled their concerted attacks with ever-increasing vigour and fury.

"The various offensives rapidly followed each other, or rather they were fitted in so as to embrace the whole of the Front. Our troops were exhausted, our forces greatly reduced; but what of that? Our Allies, the English, Belgians and Americans, gave us unlimited help. Some of them attacked without knowing why or where they were going, but that did not prevent them from attacking with fire. They never recognized the weakness and disorder by which the German Armies were beset. They imagined that the War would last through the winter, perhaps for another year, while

FOCH ON LUDENDORFF

all the time the last act was in progress, the curtain about to fall. But they followed with blind trust the orders they received. Their trust and the sacred fire of their enthusiasm were the principal causes of our victory. There you have true national war, in which moral strength will always be the predominating factor.

"That is how Ludendorff appeared to me from the spiritual, philosophical point of view. As regards the professional, technical side, there is much to be said in criticism of him, particularly of his offensives during the last six months of the War."

"Do you not think, sir, that the German General Staff committed grave technical mistakes in the direction of operations during the 1918 offensives?"

"Undoubtedly, and those errors were very great. If we examine the offensives launched during the last year of the War, we must agree that in the tactical details of his operations, Ludendorff planned his attacks admirably. The planning was perfect; it could not have been bettered. But—there were no after-plans. That was their greatest defect. In other words, Ludendorff prepared and accomplished his first act marvelously; but he seems to have paid no attention to subsequent acts. He had no notion of the ensemble, and no plan on a large scale.

"An idea of the ensemble is absolutely necessary;

MARSHAL FOCH

without it, only minor results can be obtained. The commander must think not only of the present and the following week, but of the months ahead of him. Obviously, he cannot fix upon a plan immutable in all its details; he must allow for possible alterations, especially in the length of the intervals. What is required of him is firm leadership and the choice of a distant aim towards which all his efforts should tend.

"What happened to Ludendorff as his various offensives took place? The attacking armies grew fatally tired; their progress, their gains in territory, prisoners and guns diminished as the intervals between attacks increased, during which we brought up our reserves. At a point between the tenth and fifteenth days the offensive usually reached its height; then followed an interval, sometimes of considerable length, which allowed us to reconstitute our forces; and then once more Ludendorff would begin the same operation, in the same way with the same rhythm. Decisive results are not obtained like that.

"Let us suppose that the German attack of March 21, 1918, formed part of a different offensive. This attack was at first brilliantly successful. It wiped out an entire English Army. The German Staff sent its divisions one after the other into the pocket thus hollowed out. But let us suppose that, instead, they had tried to make Amiens fall by stratagem. Once the town was

FOCH ON LUDENDORFF

in the power of the Germans, the French would be isolated from the English, and the situation would have been extremely unhealthy.

"The German offensive in Flanders, launched on April 9, was in principle only a diversion, by which the Germans profited to the full. It was purely supplementary.

"On May 27 Ludendorff again succeeded admirably, but again for lack of an all-embracing plan, his brilliant victory had no sequel. The German Divisions were successively engulfed by the deep pocket which, so long as we were firmly ensconced on either side, was far more harmful than beneficial to the Germans.

"On July 15, he tried, by an offensive on a large scale, to break our front and thus bring about the fall of Paris. On July 18, our counter-offensive completely wrecked his plans. The situation was now reversed. He no longer had a chance of winning.

"All his strategic notions, as you see, were fragmentary and abbreviated. His mind lacked breadth; he could not visualize the whole. We never came upon a scenario complete with all its acts. Only the first act occupied his thoughts, and once it was accomplished he was prepared to contemplate a second act. But it was then too late.

"On May 27, Ludendorff's attack on the Chemin-des-Dames was followed by extraordinarily brilliant, al-

MARSHAL FOCH

most unexpected results. We were forced back, and the Germans gained considerable ground. And yet the results were not in his favour. Why not?

"A long-headed general meditating on the subject would ask himself this vital question. There is but one answer; final victory cannot depend upon the success, however outstanding, of a single attack. That attack must be linked to a certain number of others; it must be a part of a whole, not the whole itself. That is what Ludendorff forgot.

"Ludendorff tried two or three times in succession to break our front, without obtaining decisive results. The essential point, however, was not to break the line but to diminish and eventually annihilate the enemy's reserves, so that he could not retaliate. That is how we regarded the situation as soon as we had regained the initiative.

"Ludendorff left too long a lull between each attack —a serious error for him to make. After his overwhelming success at the Chemin-des-Dames on May 27, we passed through a month of mental and bodily tribulation. The French reserves had almost entirely vanished. If an attack were launched against the English in Flanders, it would have been almost impossible for us to go once more to their rescue. I know that the German forces were also exhausted and diminished; but theirs was the fatigue of victory. The

FOCH ON LUDENDORFF

French Army felt the exhaustion that is the aftermath of a serious check.

“But, as I never tired of telling my Staff and the Allied generals: ‘Victory can be won only by bits and scraps. After a battle, everyone is tired, winner and loser alike; the only difference is that the winner has more determination and more spiritual strength than the loser. That is the only reason why he is the winner. A beaten army is an army that believes itself beaten.’

“The German General Staff had planned and perfected a wonderful method of attack. The German Army tried it against the English on March 21, 1918, with entire success. After that they used it without making the slightest modification. There again is a big mistake. Once more they were enslaved by a system. That, you know, is the great flaw in the German mind. The Germans are inclined to believe that a plan, once conceived, will succeed in all circumstances so long as they employ it. That is far from being the case. Genuine intelligence, in soldiers or civilians, must be more flexible. Plans must be adapted to circumstances. Napoleon always acted on that principle; he was careful not to bind himself by unvarying formulæ and methods. Life does not allow of such rigidity.

“The Germans’ plan was based on the element of

MARSHAL FOCH

surprise. Therein lay its chief merit. They were to take infinitesimal pains to disguise the preparation of their line, the arrival of their shock divisions and the arrangement of their powerful artillery; then, at a signal, they were to deliver at their unsuspecting adversary a blow capable of shaking his hold or felling him utterly.

“Only, the French, English and Americans were not, after all, complete fools, and it was inevitable that they should at last see through the German stratagem. You know the proverb: ‘Deceive me once, or twice, and you are to blame. But deceive me three times and the fault is mine?’ Well, the Germans succeeded in taking us by surprise not twice, but three times. At their fourth performance we were on our guard; we had penetrated their tactics and thought out an excellent defence. Their offensive of July 15 was a complete failure. They had, very mistakenly, put all their forces into the fight. The end was near. They had lost.

“Those are the outlines of the last year of the War. They show what, in my opinion, were Ludendorff’s chief errors.”

“Do you think, sir, that after the first two weeks of August, when he felt that the tables were turned in favour of the Allies and that he had lost the initiative for ever—do you think that by a timely concentration of his troops, and by decisiveness of action he might

FOCH ON LUDENDORFF

have avoided the long series of overwhelming defeats that would have led to catastrophe but for the Armistice?"

"He certainly might have done so, but only by making the heaviest of sacrifices. That is a point that must be stressed. He would have been forced to abandon most of the captured material collected by the Germans during the previous four years and then stored in the provinces they occupied. He would have been obliged to decide at once to withdraw to the Rhine, which offers an excellent defensive position and needs far fewer troops. In its shelter the Germans might have prolonged the War considerably. If the Allied Governments and nations had been overcome by weariness, they might have forced us to a blank peace. There was only one card that a determined general could, in case of necessity, play; and Ludendorff refused to play it. He could not make up his mind to sacrifice his loot; above all, I believe that he was unwilling to abandon the ground that Germany still held—Belgium, part of some French provinces, Alsace and Lorraine—the possession of which would, he thought, enable him to obtain more favourable peace terms.

"A few weeks later, however, Ludendorff realized how disappointing such securities can prove. What is the value of a conquered province when there is no

MARSHAL FOCH

army to defend it? Defeats accumulated so rapidly that at the end of September and the beginning of October, Ludendorff completely lost his head. We know it now from all the books that have been published. He believed the situation to be much worse than it really was. He turned to his Government, requested, almost prayed, for an armistice at any price, in order to prevent his front from collapsing.

"None of which shows great signs of self-control or balance."

XII

FOCH EXPLAINS THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE AND THE PART HE PLAYED

ONE day the Marshal's room was unusually full of military maps that sprawled on tables and chairs and even on the floor.

Foch guessed at my surprise.

"You are wondering what all that means. Well, I have begun to write that part of my Memoirs dealing with the battle of the Marne. I am trying to see everything clearly and take everything into account. De Mierry, one of my Staff Officers, prepared these maps for me, and now I am in the midst of retrospective stratagems revived in a room.

"We know exactly what happened on our side, and we have now learned what happened on the other. The Commanders of the chief German Armies have published their Memoirs—von Kluck, von Bülow and von Hausen. So it is comparatively easy to reconstruct the outlines of the battle. We can see it as it really occurred. It is very curious and very simple."

The Marshal sat down in his usual chair and rang for an orderly; he asked for more tobacco, then filled and lighted his pipe and began to speak.

MARSHAL FOCH

"Let us examine only the salient points of the battle of the Marne. What do we see? Germany had for years past been preparing and perfecting a first-class army; in power and worth it was far superior to that of 1870, excellent as the latter was. She had cleverly brought about the War for which she had prepared. Her army was in splendid condition; she lacked nothing of the equipment, knowledge and arms then available. She was imbued with the military spirit and a doctrine; she was sure of herself. Too sure.

"Who was Moltke, her Commander-in-Chief? Not merely the nephew of his uncle, but also his pupil. The strategic plan of von Schlieffen, which he was to follow, lacked neither scope nor boldness. Like all stratagems, its worth lay in the manner of its execution. Napoleon several times changed his plans to suit them to circumstances. He completely altered them, for example, on the eve of the battle of Jena. Napoleon was on the spot. He knew everything. He directed everything. But Moltke all too often knew nothing until it was too late. He superintended nothing. His H. Q. were too far from the scene of war. He did not know exactly what was happening. He purposely left his principal colleagues entire liberty, which they sometimes used and sometimes abused.

"Why did Moltke conduct himself in such a way?

THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

Partly because he was weak, timid, and of second-rate intelligence; also because he was the faithful disciple of his uncle, whom he copied even in his errors. The German mind is instinctively inclined to believe that the organization of a plan is of paramount importance; once it is set in motion, everything, according to their belief, should happen in its season, notwithstanding obstacles and accidents. The machine should be wound up and then left to its work.

"Old Moltke, in 1870, had given the same liberty of action to his colleagues. So it came about that operations were directed by subordinates, not by the commander. In 1914 the same mistakes were made; then they were more serious, for the labourer had lost in importance and the tool had gained. The generals tampered as they wished with the somewhat vague instructions of their chief. His attitude in face of their disobedience was curious. Instead of administering severe reprimands, he bore their lapses in silence, mesmerized by memories of 1870 and convinced that the result be as happy in 1914 as then.

"In view of his quiescent state, the disobedience became more marked, especially on the part of von Kluck, who had the essential task of turning the opposing army. Von Kluck commanded the advancing wing, and it advanced with amazing speed. If you

MARSHAL FOCH

follow its movements through Belgium and the North of France day by day, you will be astonished at its rapidity. The torrent was as difficult to regulate as to stem. Orders from G. H. Q. often failed to reach him. When they caught up with him, the situation had often altered.

"On August 28, Moltke ordered von Kluck to march to the west of the Oise, near the Basse-Seine. Instead of obeying, von Kluck deliberately made for the south-east. Moltke hastened to sanction the move. Strong in the knowledge of this approval, von Kluck hastened on. By September 3, three of his five *corps d'armée* had already crossed the Marne. At that point he received orders from G.H.Q. to form echelon on his Second *corps d'armée*. Such an order clearly proves that G.H.Q. had no notion of the whereabouts of von Kluck's command. It was believed to be much more to the north than was really the case; as in 1870, a thick fog surrounded the movements of the German Armies. At the beginning of such an important battle Moltke did not know the whereabouts of the most important of his units, the troops upon which he counted for decisive results. What can one think of such a Commander-in-Chief?

"Coming on the top of all that confusion, our offensive on the Marne was admirably timed. Von Kluck was attacked from his right by Maunoury and was

THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

obliged to retreat with all possible haste. He again crossed the Marne, this time more speedily than the first. Then certain of his units crossed the lines of communication of neighbouring units. The result was chaos.

“At that moment, Von Kluck’s Ninth *corps d’armée*, says von Bülow, ‘was covering the right wing of the Second Army, so that our Seventh *corps d’armée* was, on September 6, completely paralyzed.’ Another result was that von Kluck’s abrupt retreat northwards created an enormous void between his army and the adjacent army. The latter, forced by the English Divisions and Franchet d’Esperey’s troops, was in a critical situation that rapidly grew worse. Von Kluck tried to turn Maunoury’s troops. Von Bülow and von Hausen tried to scatter my own troops at Marais de Saint-Gond and at Fère-Champenoise.

“The German Commander-in-Chief had changed his plans.

“Convinced that he could not obtain decisive results from the right wing because of the fierce resistance encountered by von Kluck’s force, he tried to obtain them from the centre by ordering it to break the enemy’s front just at the place where I was stationed, namely, on either side of Fère-Champenoise.

“All his efforts were of no avail. We held firm; we also counter-attacked. To avoid disaster, orders were

MARSHAL FOCH

given for a general retreat. There you have the whole explanation of the battle of the Marne."

"In fact, sir, the battle of the Marne was lost by the Germans rather than won by us—which in no way diminishes the merit of our soldiers and their leaders."

"That is true of many battles," he answered. "What we call victory is never won save by bits and scraps. The two trays of the scales counterbalance for a long time, and the slightest additional touch suffices to weigh one of them down."

"While this battle was proceeding in all its fluctuations, were you aware of them, sir? Did you feel that the Germans were in a bad way?"

"I received the definite impression that, since they were attacking us so furiously, things could not be progressing elsewhere as they had hoped; especially on their right. The information we received daily from adjacent troops and G.H.Q. confirmed that impression.

"Having failed in their encircling movement, the Germans tried to compensate for it by breaking the centre, where I was. 'You want to break me,' I thought. 'You shall not do it. I'll withdraw if I must, but as little as possible. If my right wing is attacked, I'll hold on by my left; but you shall not pass.' I was filled with a wild obstinacy.

"That is all I did for four days of fighting.

"When I left my Lorraine troops, which I had com-

THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

manded from the outbreak of war, I was nominated by Joffre to the command of the new army he had formed in the centre of the French force. At first, I busied myself during the retreat with assembling and keeping together the divisions under my care. Just at the beginning of the great battle of the Marne, on which the destiny of our country depended, the ground over which I had to fight certainly gave me no natural advantages. But I had to be content with it. There was an obstacle seven kilometres in length: the now historic Saint-Gond marshes. They could be crossed by four roads only. To the north, south and west of the marshes are many irregularities of land that render the position a favourable one to defend. But all the country lying to the east is composed of vast, gently undulating chalky plains open on all sides, and lacks any accidental features that might afford stronghold or shelter. This flatness obliged me to concentrate on my right many more troops than I wished to place there. That was not all. Between my extreme right and the left flank of the adjacent Fourth Army was an enormous gap thirty-six kilometres wide. My sole means of stopping it, in entirely open country, consisted of one division of cavalry. On the eve of the fight, the Fourth Army informed me that as it was to fight in close conjunction with the Third Army, it would not be possible for its troops to extend in my direction. Between my

MARSHAL FOCH

troops and the Fourth Army there was, therefore, to be a yawning gap. Such were the conditions under which the battle of the Marne began.

"By the evening of the first day, my whole front had been attacked; my left flank held firm in close proximity to the Fifth Army. On this side, the efforts of the Germans had failed. In the centre, I had lost the advance posts to the north of the marshes, I had a firm hold of the south. But my right had seriously yielded to pressure. As it received no support from the ground, my right flank could not stand firm, and the German march could be stemmed only with the greatest difficulty.

"My Army had, however, played its part in the affair. It had been opposed by a considerable adverse force, and had put up a successful resistance. News from the rest of the Front was very satisfactory.

"From that moment, I saw with the utmost distinctness the mission of sacrifice on which my troops were embarked. It was an almost physical vision, startling in its clearness, blindingly bright. During my sleepless night I kept on saying to myself, 'Even if I have to yield ground slightly, my front must at all costs be maintained.'

"The Germans were firmly resolved on breaking the centre of the French Armies, where I had taken up my stand. They intended to separate my Army

THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

from the neighbouring Fourth Army. During the last three days of the fight, they rushed upon me with redoubled fury. Throughout the battle my right flank was the most sorely tried. The second day resembled the first. My left flank held firm; my right had yielded ground and definitely lost the line of defence along the Sanne.

“On the two last days, September 8 and 9, the German onslaught reached its culminating point. Before dawn on the 8th, at three-thirty in the morning, my right flank was furiously attacked by three German divisions, which included a division of the Guard, commanded by General von Kirchbach. We learnt the details afterwards.

“You yourself were there. You must remember with what force the Germans attacked us. They launched five attacks in succession till their object was attained. Our left flank retired in disorder to Fère-Champenoise and dragged in their retreat some of the adjacent troops. In vain did General Eydoux try to rally his men at Fère-Champenoise; he could stop them only to the south of that place. As soon as I was informed of these grave events, I decided that at any price we must reoccupy Fère-Champenoise. I used all the troops at my disposal; I appealed for help to the neighbouring armies. My counter-attack was launched in the afternoon. It failed to regain Fère-Champenoise, but

MARSHAL FOCH

it stopped the enemy's advance and kept him at the same point for some time.

"At the end of that day, the third, my Army was still standing firm, but the situation had appreciably increased in gravity.

"My right flank was in a very bad state; it could find no foothold by which it could steady its position. What ought I to do? For the first part of the night I examined the question in all its aspects. I found the answer. Since my left was holding its own, some of its troops could be rapidly withdrawn to the right, to support the part of our front that was in danger of breaking. I therefore asked the Commander of the neighbouring Army on the left (General Franchet d'Esperey) to withdraw his 42nd Division, which I decided to transfer to my right by a flank march.

"On the morning of the fourth day, the attacks of the enemy increased in violence. The Morocco Division, where you were with General Humbert, was, as you know, seriously attacked; it lost the Château de Mondement, which is now more than any other place involved in the battle of the Marne, the centre of many moving pilgrimages. But it succeeded in clinging to its last slopes. While the 42nd Division was performing its flank march, it succoured the Morocco Division to the best of its ability. General Grossetti lent General Humbert the aid of his batteries and two battalions of

THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

chasseurs. The 77th Regiment, which I had placed at Humbert's disposition to regain Mondement at all costs, arrived by forced marches."

"I, myself, saw the arrival of that magnificent regiment, sir. It is one of my most vivid, most pathetic war-memories. The men had covered a great distance in a terrible heat, and when they climbed the steep incline leading to the plateau from which they were to attack the castle, they were covered with dust and sweat. Around them the batteries of Colonel Boichut, who was so expert with 75s, were drawn up to assault the surroundings of the castle, and made a deafening uproar. At two o'clock of the afternoon, a first attack on the castle was launched by the 77th and by the remains of the Zouaves. It failed. A second was launched. That, too, failed. Then Humbert brought up a 75 gun four hundred yards from the park gates, which were thus blown open. At six-thirty, he launched a third attack, which was successful. The Germans were driven back in disorder at the point of the bayonet. Colonel Lestoquois, commandant of the 77th, sent us the following message: 'I am holding Mondement village and castle; I shall stay at the latter for the night.'"

"Humbert and his men were wonderful," said Foch. "His resistance during that day, his attacks and his recapture of Mondement were vital to the success of my

MARSHAL FOCH

Army. The 42nd Division was thus able to perform its flank march under the best possible conditions. Towards the end of the day, I was clinging to the last yards of the slope with the energy of despair. If my left wing, for all its efforts, had yielded the slightest ground, the whole of my Army would have been thrown into the plain of Champagne, and the centre of the French Front would have run the risk of breaking. German pressure continued as strongly as ever. I gave all the encouragement I could. I announced the speedy arrival of powerful aid in the shape of the 42nd Division. Towards the middle of the afternoon, I issued the following order of the day to my troops: ‘At a moment when the honour and safety of France are in danger, officers and men must put forward all the strength of our race to hold on till the enemy retreats exhausted. It must be clearly understood that success will go to the side that holds out the longer.’

“Towards the middle of the afternoon, the 42nd Division, issuing from the Sézanne main road, prepared for a grand attack which had as objective the recapture of Fère-Champenoise at all costs.

“I made a last appeal to the men. The attack began. That very moment saw the beginning of a German retreat embracing the whole Front. The battle of the Marne was won.”

“How do you account for the fact, sir, that the battle,

THE BATTLE OF THE MARNE

in all that concerned the pursuit of the beaten Germans, was not still more important? Of course, it shattered the German offensive, which was in itself an immense result; but we were forced to suspend our pursuit a few days afterwards, leaving the enemy in possession of part of our land."

"You must not forget that our troops were tired to the point of exhaustion. They had been in a retreat lasting two weeks and then in a battle that lasted four days. Here and there some of the pursuers were undoubtedly faint-hearted. In my own Army, the general ordered to enter Châlons might, with a little more boldness, have taken hosts of prisoners, including a royal prince and his staff then engaged in drinking champagne at the Hôtel de la Haute-Mère-Dieu. He foolishly allowed himself to be diverted by a few shots fired from the outskirts of the town. A true general, instead of losing two or three hours in firing on a handful of the enemy, would have sent one battalion to his right and one to his left, crushed the slight resistance he encountered, encircled the town and gathered in all the enemy within its walls. I severely reprimanded him when I heard of the incident, but the harm was done. Similar cases occurred elsewhere. But in the main, the French Armies fought magnificently."

XIII

FOCH EXPLAINS THE LATE WAR

SOME military books published in France and Germany led the Marshal to discuss the whole War.

"Nobody has really tried to extract its inner meaning. It should be thoroughly examined. After a review of what is a very recent past, some light should be thrown on the future, some attempt should be made to imagine what a future war will be, if such a misfortune ever comes to pass."

The Marshal sat down again, lit his pipe and was soon developing some of the ideas dear to his heart.

"We are constantly hearing of a trench war and a moving war, as though they were two separate things. Such an assumption is both wrong and childish. It is the same eternal war, continuing under different forms.

"We experienced some unhappy surprises at the very beginning of hostilities. We had stepped into a hornets' nest, as they say. We then believed that morale alone counted, which is an infantile notion. Only a very primitive sense of strategy would hold that an immediate and thorough attack is the one means of

THE LATE WAR

beating the enemy; such a plan would not need much intelligence for its execution. Happily for us, the German General Staff also committed some serious errors. It had to deal with an excellent French Command, which had not been the case in 1870. If you add to that the adaptability of our men—who in spite of a long retreat put forth all their strength at the right moment—you have the whole explanation of the battle of the Marne.

“The Germans, with heavy reinforcements, made every possible effort to force their way across the Yser and reach the Channel coast. Their attempts and their sacrifices were in vain. On either side matters were at a standstill. No better move being possible, the armies dug themselves in. That is trench warfare; it is essentially a manifestation of powerlessness. The Germans could do nothing against us, nor we against them.

“The reason for our inaction was lack of *matériel*. We had to be provided with this, which was not achieved in one day nor yet in one month. People seem to think that is a new feature of war. On the contrary, it has very often happened. Roman historians tell us that the legionaries in addition to their ponderous shields, javelins, etc., carried stakes so that their tents could not be blown away at night by gales. They were far-seeing men who did not venture unprepared into a land where the elements might prove as adverse

MARSHAL FOCH

as their enemies. They were admirably capable of safeguarding themselves against all possible dangers.

"Unfortunately for us, we did not imitate their prudence. At the outbreak of the War, we were like a soldier who has brought his arms of attack, but has forgotten his means of defence. And the shield is as indispensable as the javelin. When we were at last provided with the *matériel* in which we had been lacking, what is called a war of movement was at once begun. You see how futile and childish it is to set the two forms of warfare against each other. When they are closely examined, they are seen to be composed of identical elements.

"You must dwell on the eternal, essential ingredients of war, not on its mere incidentals. If you want a complete understanding of the late War, you must examine the surprises and revelations of its start.

"The German preparations, on the material side, were far superior to ours. They had studied the functions of heavy artillery, and acquired considerable knowledge of the use of trenches, whereas we believed that morale was all that mattered. From Commander-in-Chief down to corporals, nothing could be heard but talk enthusiastic for the offensive, the advance. It is undoubtedly an excellent thing to imbue corporals with such a spirit, but the plans of the Commander-in-Chief should be founded on an altogether

THE LATE WAR

different basis. Individual attacks could not give great results.

"You must notice also that the Germans made precisely the same mistakes at the battle of the Yser. They threw indiscriminately into the hottest furnace of the fight their intellectuals, the youth of Berlin and of countless great families; there were no distinctions of class or caste. They were determined to win a decisive victory. But all their holocausts were in vain.

"I remember," added the Marshal, "going to Metz with President Millerand. We were on a visit to one of the forts there, and I questioned the sentry on duty. He was a Lorraine man who had fought all through the War in the German Army and been wounded at the battle of the Yser. 'Real hell, it was,' he told us. 'They pushed us forward, and we were killed like flies.' He was right.

"When both sides realized that it was absurd to have been massacred for nothing, every means was taken to supply as quickly as possible the lacking *matériel*. But how slow and hesitant and fumbling it all was!

"During 1915, we tried to demolish the Germans bit by bit. That is not war, for while you are dealing with a particle of their forces they are doing likewise to you. There can be no important results. The offensive undertaken in September, 1915, only broke the German

MARSHAL FOCH

surface, which closed up again almost immediately. So the work had to be begun all over again.

"In 1916, the Germans tried their hardest to take Verdun. In vain. All their labour was lost. Not only did they need more forces; they also required different methods of attack. That is what you overlook. You concentrate on breaking through the line, the effectiveness of a direct, brutal blow—but you never *do* break through. You merely pierce the surface. Another immediately forms. That is not the way to set to work. You cannot dispense with a greater amount of head-work; you will not get results from a single attack—which by itself can do nothing—but from a well-planned, well-executed, well-placed series.

"The battle of the Somme was at first undertaken solely and uniquely to deliver Verdun. Although our resources were unfortunately very limited, the enterprise was, in principle, correct. As an offensive it showed great progress in methods of warfare. Our forces, although still inadequate, had greatly increased in strength. The incessant pounding to which we subjected the Germans was efficacious. We thought so then; to-day our impressions are confirmed by Ludendorff and Hindenburg. The two German leaders were then forced to consider the withdrawal of their lines, which is the best possible proof of the success of our tactics.

THE LATE WAR

“Such an operation, if combined with others, should have won victory for us in 1917 while the Russian Front was still in existence. The concomitant operations should have been carefully planned in outline and detail, based on the actual problem in all its complexity, not on false assumptions, as in 1917. But we had no vast, carefully constructed plan. We lacked men, but still more did we lack plans. Victory eluded us. It came only in the following year. It came when, aided by an enormous quantity of men and munitions, we at last resorted to necessary methods. When we launched a well-conceived series of attacks on the enemy, when we arranged for them so to occur that the enemy had no respite, we smashed and shattered his reserve.

“But (and this is important), if you compare the Army I commanded in 1918 with that of Joffre in 1914, you will be struck by the huge difference between them. They were totally unlike each other. I have asked my Staff to prepare a few figures that I will show you. They are very impressive, and show in all completeness the difference I have mentioned.

“In 1918 and 1914 we had approximately the same number of soldiers; but instead of having 1,634 battalions of infantry, in 1918 we had only 1,081. Now for the rest. Instead of two mitrailleuses for each battalion, we now had twelve, that is, six times as many

MARSHAL FOCH

guns—without counting thirty-six machine-guns, a 37 field-gun and a mortar. Our force, then, had increased more than tenfold. The infantry battalion had changed in composition. Instead of being almost exclusively composed of foot-soldiers, it had become a corps of specially trained men.

“Instead of a total of 5,000 mitrailleuses, we now had 60,000, or twelve times as many. In 1914 we had no machine-guns; in 1918 we had 120,000. One hundred and fifty million bombs were made during the War. (Remember that figure.) So much for the infantry.

“When you come to artillery, you will see that the changes were still more far-reaching. Instead of the 308 heavy guns of 1914, we had more than 5,000 of all calibres. To keep all those gun-barrels full, we had to have an intensive period of munition-making.

“At the Armistice we had nearly 3,000 tanks; a year later we would have had many more.

“At the beginning we had 120 aeroplanes; in 1918 we had 2,400 in the French Army. All the rest was in keeping.

“You see that I was right in saying that our Army in 1918 was utterly different in composition and equipment from our Army in 1914.

“Anyone who sets out to get at the inner meaning and philosophy of war, must take that factor above all into account. Have nothing to do with meaningless,

THE LATE WAR

ready-made catchwords like trench warfare, war of movement; look at the reality behind such hollow phrases.

“One of the mistakes most frequently made is the assertion that immediately after the battle of the Marne, trench warfare took the place of a war of motion.

“That statement omits one of the most important links in the chain. The victory of the Marne, by stemming the progress of the invaders, saved France. But immediately afterwards the Germans began another offensive in the North, with the Pas-de-Calais as objective. We succeeded in stopping them, thereby saving not only France this time, but the coalition. For if they had succeeded, they would have destroyed the rest of Belgium, seized all the Channel ports and cut all communications with England. Our situation would then have been extremely unhealthy.

“This second invasion was saved by our victory on the Yser. You know with what ill-matched elements it was won, and how we managed to weld English, Belgians, marines, Algerian gunners, Spahis, Canadians, etc., into one harmonious whole.

“In short, the Germans were stopped on the Yser as they had been on the Marne. That is a point that should be emphasized. For the battle of the Yser was comprised of almost equal proportions of trench warfare and war of movement.”

XIV

FOCH'S VIEWS ON THE WAR AND THE ARMY OF THE FUTURE

THE profound transformation that occurred during the four years of war should make us reflect deeply. When we organize a new army, we should take great heed of that factor. But I fear that we have not done so. We have fallen back into the old rut.

"War is in itself," said Foch, "only a matter of maintaining harmonious proportion between the spiritual and bodily elements. Fundamentally that is so. If no such proportion is attained, however excellent an army be, it can do nothing against its adversary.

"Taking what I have said into consideration, try to imagine what a future war may be. Think especially what must be the part played by aviation. It would be the dominating factor, since towns far distant from the front can be attacked from the air; the morale of the whole nation would be in danger, since the whole nation would itself participate in the struggle.

"Then consider a chemical war, in which gases are used. The League of Nations or any other league can

THE WAR OF THE FUTURE

make unlimited decisions, try to regulate warfare or forbid it altogether. But how can you be sure that its decisions will be brought into force? When a nation risks all it has in a war, it finds it very difficult not to use all the weapons at its disposal, forbidden or not, if the use of them makes victory possible.

“What you must do is to avoid the outbreak of war; do not tempt nations to become your adversaries. The best, indeed the only means to this end, are solid frontiers and an excellent army.”

XV

FOCH ON NAPOLEON

FOCH'S mind always worked in one way and his methods were always the same, whether he dealt with study or action, with the elucidation of a problem in history or the construction of a stratagem. He always reviewed the whole matter rapidly, selected the essential point and then pounced on it, grasped it and extracted all its contents. When this had been done, the supplementary matters were analyzed with extraordinary speed.

His method is nowhere more vividly manifested than in the eulogy of Napoleon he pronounced beneath the cupola of the Invalides on May 5, 1921, the hundredth anniversary of Napoleon's death.

A more moving ceremony can scarcely be imagined. Beneath the magnificent dome a gathering of the highest state officials and all that was highest in art and learning was assembled in the dusk of a fine summer day. Before them, one of the greatest generals in our history spoke from the tomb of the greatest leader of all time. A brilliant disciple praised his master in the sober, simple, precise words fitting to his subject; but

FOCH ON NAPOLEON

he was also courageous in mentioning the gaps and limitations of his genius. A fine sight, and an incomparable lesson.

I mentioned it to Foch one day. I told him how greatly impressed I had been.

"You do not know in what curious circumstances I wrote my address," he said; "I was about to leave for London, to attend one of the innumerable conferences that have followed the Peace Treaty. You know that we were continually moved from one capital to another, and from one watering place to another, in order to settle—or rather, try to settle—the legions of questions that arose from the bad, hateful Treaty of Versailles. Just as I was about to go, one of the organizers of the commemoration ceremony came to me. 'You must deliver an eulogy on Napoleon at the Invalides, but it must not last longer than a quarter of an hour.'

"To compress an eulogy on Napoleon into fifteen minutes was not, I felt, an easy matter. There was no question of dealing with strategic or military matters; both time and place were against it. What, then, could I do? How solve an apparently insoluble problem? The only way was to take one or two of his outstanding characteristics and dwell upon them as strongly as possible. That is what I resolved upon doing. I reflected and finally wrote the address in my suite at Claridge's Hotel, London.

MARSHAL FOCH

"Thus obliged to give a single glance at Napoleon's colossal work, military and constitutional, what salient point should my eye select? Before me was the following problem: what was the art of war that Napoleon raised to unimagined heights?

"I have given much thought to the matter, and it seems to me that his art consisted of a few principles of extraordinary simplicity and clarity. These he used with the touch of a master. To husband his troops; to use them judiciously so that the enemy might be attacked at his weakest point with superior forces; to keep control of his men, even when they were scattered, as a coachman holds the reins, so that they could be concentrated at a moment's notice; to mark down that portion of the opposing army that he aimed at destroying; to discern the critical point where defeat might be turned into rout; to surprise the enemy by the rapidity of his conceptions and operations—those are a few of the essential elements of Napoleon's military genius.

"Once I took up that central position, it was comparatively easy to make excursions around it. The main point of the subject was no longer in darkness. I had now only to find two or three examples—the most conclusive and striking ones possible.

"I took the following one. At Paris on the evening

FOCH ON NAPOLEON

of April 12, 1809, Napoleon learnt that Austria had declared war. Five days later, on the 17th, he was at Donauwerth in an H.Q. empty of generals. He then and there garnered all useful information, assembled his scattered forces, charged at the centre of the enemy's army, cut it in two and routed it. By April 23, only eleven days after leaving Paris, he had crippled the great Austrian Army and opened the road to Vienna.

"That is a fact that explains, better than any book, the stupefying rapidity of his manœuvres. Clear-sightedness, quick decisions and quicker action are its keynotes. Into the midst of a confused situation he himself threw the beam of light by which all his subordinates were guided. In the end, the enemy, incapable of grasping the whole plan, could only feel the mad onrushes, from which it was then too late to defend himself.

"The secret of Napoleon was to meet events half-way so that he could control them, instead of waiting and allowing them to over-ride him. But it is important to note that he first of all carefully studied the field of operations and the conditions under which he was to fight. He knew in advance what events were inevitable. He may be compared to a chess-player who takes in at a glance the state of the chess-board: he does not stop at what I may call its static condition; but

MARSHAL FOCH

he also notes its dynamic potentialities; he sees the relative positions of the chess-men, but he also pays attention to their possible moves whenever any one of them is placed elsewhere. Napoleon and the chess-player appear to improvise, but the improvisation is never undertaken in a haphazard fashion.

“‘I have no familiar spirit,’ he himself said one day, ‘to reveal to me in secret what I must do or say in circumstances unexpected by others; I reflect and meditate.’

“The art of war was thus raised by Napoleon to unknown heights. Unhappily, as his art rose to dizzy altitudes it sometimes bore with it Napoleon himself. I have lauded my subject; I must also show with equal force and clearness the deep-seated, overwhelming reasons that brought about his fall.

“The chief of these reasons is that Napoleon identified his country’s greatness with his own, and aspired to regulate the destinies of all other nations by force of arms. A people cannot live by glory alone; it must work. In the civilized world power founded solely on force, however impregnated with genius it may be, must inevitably bow before spiritual strength. Napoleon himself was doomed to failure, not because he lacked genius, but because he attempted the impossible.

“We must never forget,” said Foch, “that peace is

FOCH ON NAPOLEON

above war. On that note I resolved to bring my address to a close."

It will readily be agreed that a nobler, finer note could not have been sounded. Nothing Foch has ever said redounds so greatly to his honour.

During another conversation we were talking of Napoleon, as we often did, when I asked the Marshal if he thought that Napoleon's teachings might have been applied during the late War.

"Those teachings," said Foch, "are based, not on abstract principles, but on reason and common sense. Do not forget the Emperor's favourite saying, 'War is a simple art; the value of it lies in its accomplishment.' In other words, they might profitably have been applied to recent operations.

"For a whole century the German General Staff studied Napoleon's warfare with the greatest possible care and thoroughness. Unhappily for them, but fortunately for us, they devoted most of their care to his plans. They neglected the execution thereof, which is, if anything, the more important.

"For a striking proof of this you have only to note the events of the war of 1870. In spite of careful plans—which he omitted to superintend carefully enough in their execution, because he had no proper control over his subordinates—in spite of them, Moltke would indubitably have been beaten by the French if we had

MARSHAL FOCH

been adequately commanded. It is unquestionable. I established the fact firmly, and proved its truth during my lectures at the Staff College. You have only to refer to them. The German commander was continually leaving his officers to muddle through as best they could. He never intervened in their decisions and plans. If on the French side there had been a few good generals, or even one good general, the Germans would not have won.

"A resounding victory, a victory which was, moreover, totally unexpected, prevented the Germans from perceiving the faults they had committed; later it caused them to persist in their errors. In 1914, Moltke's nephew, also Commander-in-Chief, made the same mistakes as his uncle. They were then appreciably graver, for the instrument he wielded was ten times weightier—if he can be said to have wielded it. The plan conceived by von Schlieffen was excellent, but it was badly executed. Imagine Napoleon at the head of the invading armies. He would not have stationed himself three or four hundred kilometres behind the lines, where he could not come into contact with his principal colleagues; he would not have left the initiative and the onus of deciding to subordinates; he would have controlled events instead of suffering them to occur. He would have been on the spot; all decisions would have been made by him. Moltke did not

FOCH ON NAPOLEON

emulate his example. But Joffre did, and that is why he won the battle of the Marne.

“As soon as we were able to take the initiative, that is to say in 1918, we adopted the methods of Napoleon. The problem, of course, was no longer as it had been in Napoleon’s time. It was ten times, a hundred times, as big. But the simple, clear principles that guided us were identical: a judicious choice of ground, rapidity in attack, well-planned offensives that would leave the enemy no breathing-space between attacks, a crescendo of fury in the fight until the enemy should beg for mercy—there you have the principles of Napoleon’s tactics. In all modesty, we tried to apply them to our problems.

“Close study of these methods ultimately leads to discovery of the fundamentals of his genius.

“You will find that they comprise astonishing quickness in planning and deciding, the ability to disentangle with speed problems that were obscure to others, and power to grasp their essential points; then he would act on a few principles of great simplicity and clarity, using them with incomparable dexterity and neglecting no precaution. That is all, and a very great deal it is.”

I once asked Foch by which of Napoleon’s military gifts he was most struck.

“The question is badly put,” he said. “You cannot

MARSHAL FOCH

single out one of his gifts for praise; you must take them as a whole, for Napoleon is primarily distinguished by the harmonious balance of gifts exceptionally valuable in themselves. He could visualize with accuracy extensive areas on which he planned to fight; he could instantly calculate distances and marches, and the movements to be performed by his soldiers; his genius enabled him to divine his adversary's plans from the fragmentary information he received; he could plan rapidly. And once his plan was conceived, he paid the strictest attention to all the details of its fulfilment; everything was made clear, no precaution was omitted, so that the plan might be put into execution without untoward incidents. That is the sum of his outstanding talents. He developed them, as he himself said, by deep thought; he used to train them by a kind of mental gymnastic. But he possessed them when he was very young; they were apparent at his first important command, in his first Italian campaign."

"Which of his campaigns, sir, do you consider the finest? In which do you think his talents were best displayed?"

"There are certain ones which may be classed together; his first Italian campaign, and his campaigns at Marengo, Austerlitz and Jena; they are all nearly similar in merit."

"How, sir, do you explain the fact that Napoleon

FOCH ON NAPOLEON

acquired his great gifts when he was only twenty-five?"

"That is a question which I do not find easy to answer. Can you tell me why Mont Blanc is by far the highest mountain in Europe? Or how it is that a certain race-horse finds it easy to outstrip all other runners? General Colin wrote a book on Napoleon's military education and the lessons and training he received. When it was published, I criticized it adversely. Obviously, the training and lessons he received were of some consequence: they were necessary in the sense that hay and oats are necessary to a race-horse; but they were far from being sufficient. For other horses also eat hay and oats and still remain cart-horses.

"Certainly, Napoleon may have made use of his lessons—although many of them would have given him but slight help. But all that was exceptional and admirable in him he owed to himself; that was the sign of his genius.

"You must notice, however," added Foch, "that Napoleon has not had any great disciples. He formed no school. That is important. When he was on the spot, commanding everything himself, seeing to everything, all was well. As soon as he put subordinates in charge of operations, more often than not they made quantities of foolish mistakes. Why is it that no other great general sprang up in his shadow? None of his subordinates can so be termed. Davout might, perhaps,

MARSHAL FOCH

have led the armies in his stead. He had a feeling for Napoleonic manœuvres. By a stroke of misfortune, in 1813 he was imprisoned in Hamburg. He was not at Waterloo. All the others, Ney, Masséna, Murat, were excellent at carrying out orders, but they had nothing of the qualities of their great leader.

“See what happened in 1809 when Napoleon was in Spain. He sent Berthier to Germany to clear up the situation; Murat, as the Emperor’s brother-in-law, wished to be in command. There were disputes, wrangles, mistakes; everything was in a pitiful state. Matters improved only when Napoleon returned with his usual lightning speed.

“It is possible that Napoleon did not care to be surrounded by great generals. It is possible, also, that they could not develop in proximity to him. Perhaps the tree was too big and, absorbing all the nourishment of the earth, left nothing for the saplings in its shade.”

“I have sometimes thought, sir, that Napoleon was less able in conducting a war of defence than in undertaking an offensive.”

“You must rid yourself of that idea. In 1814 he conducted a defensive war admirably; but he was then dealing with an exhausted country that had tired of the fight and could do no more. Read what I have written on the battle of Laon. Read Henri Houssaye’s

FOCH ON NAPOLEON

accounts. The universal lassitude and depression are palpable."

On another occasion we were speaking of Napoleon's return from Elba. Foch severely criticized the undertaking according to those principles of right and expediency to which, he held, the military point of view should be subservient.

"It was unmitigated madness," he said. "How could he so forget the interests of the country to which he owed so much? How could he believe for one moment that his escapade would have any result? Yet he must have known that the mere news of his landing would immediately reunite the coalition and bring France face to face with the whole of Europe. He was too intelligent to be unaware of it. That is what in fact happened. When he reached Paris, in vain did he abound in promises and avowals of his peaceful intentions. No one in Europe believed him. Russians and Prussians, Austrians and English unsheathed the swords they had just laid aside. They were up in arms at once, and prepared for every effort and every sacrifice to crush the man whom they considered a troublemaker, adventurer and usurper.

"As the years went by, the love of risk and gambling arose in him. He was bored and miserable at Elba. He gambled with France as a card player risks his whole fortune on the turn of a card. Napoleon

MARSHAL FOCH

gambled and lost. A passion for risks and gambling was one of his bad qualities, one of the dark spots in a stone that united so many brilliant facets.

“We must also score against him the excessive honours and benefits with which he endowed his numerous family—at our expense. He had many brothers, sisters, brothers-in-law and cousins. They all had to be provided with thrones and principalities, and although they were given far too much, their demands and their quarrels were unceasing.

“It was a shocking example of family favouritism. The sight of a huge family of Corsicans scrambling and fighting for his favours is far from edifying.”

XVI

FOCH AND THE MARCH ON BERLIN

FOCH, who took great interest in a book I was writing on Bonaparte at the siege of Toulon, asked me which one of the gifts manifested so early by the future Emperor most struck me.

“What I find so extraordinary in him,” I said, “is the keenness and precision of his inner sight and memory. He could at once recall the peculiarities and essentials of a region on which his eyes had once looked—irregularities of the ground, mountains, rivers and natural obstacles; in short, anything that could be utilized by the commander of an army.

“More clearly than anything else, he could visualize distances. He thought in miles as most people think in images or words. His cerebral apparatus was extremely curious. His powers of observation may be noted throughout his life, from his first operations at Toulon and in Italy down to his writings towards the end of his life.”

I told the Marshal the story related by Alexandre Dumas, who as a child saw the Emperor pass through Villers-Cotterets a few days before Waterloo. He was

MARSHAL FOCH

rejoining his army with all possible speed. As his
berlin went its way, he slept. He woke up when the
horses stopped at the posting-house.

“‘Where are we?’ he asked.

“‘At Villers-Cotterets, sire.’

“‘We are six leagues from Soissons, then?’

“‘Yes, sire, we are six leagues from Soissons.’ His
first waking thought was concerned with distance.

“If we read his orders or an account of his cam-
paigns, the same power of geographical vision is seen
at work. It took the form of precise, instantaneous
descriptions of the distinguishing characteristics of the
ground or of certain positions; above all, it revealed
itself in his notion of distances. Therein lies the pro-
found originality of his mind.”

“Quite right,” said Foch. “There is no gift more
precious to the commander of an army than a feeling
for distances. On it all his plans should be founded.
Yet there are few men, however intelligent and stu-
dious, who are endowed with it.

“I will tell you a strange and interesting fact bear-
ing on the subject, that up to now has not been di-
vulged. It happened in 1922, just before we occupied
the Ruhr. A certain French politician came to tell me
of his displeasure and anger with Germany, who was
then showing a signal lack of honour in fulfilling her

THE MARCH ON BERLIN

promises. ‘Things cannot go on in this way. We must put an end to it. Since mildness is futile, we must try force. The Government will have to make its decision, and that is why I have come to consult you. We contemplate fresh military operations; we are thinking of pushing our troops as far as Berlin if necessary. Once we are there, we will find a way of constraining Germany to give us what she has promised, which so far she has obstinately refused to do. What is your opinion?’

“I looked at him for a moment in silence. Then I walked across to the wall, and we both stopped at the map of Europe now before your eyes. It is always before me, mentally and physically. I am surrounded by many maps, including maps of our frontier, Belgium and the Rhineland, but to me the map of Europe surpasses them all in importance. I take it as a guide in my studies and my thoughts.

“Well, when we were before the map, I said to him: ‘Do you know the distance between the Rhine and Berlin? It is about five hundred kilometres, slightly greater than the distance from the Rhine to Paris. Do you understand exactly what that means? We could easily go to Berlin, for in the present state of the German Army we should encounter no strong resistance. But, besides that, we should have to organize a line of pickets all along the road so that we could be sure of

MARSHAL FOCH

being revictualled and certain that our means of communication were safe. That would be quite another matter.

“Our present forces would be absolutely inadequate. We should have to mobilize at least two or three more classes. Have you thought of that? Have you calculated the disastrous effect mobilization would have upon the people, who have already suffered fifty-two months of war? What effect would it have on the rest of Europe and the rest of the world? What would be said in England and America, and the neutral countries, where people are always ready to spy on us, suspect our intentions and denounce us for an imperialistic, chauvinistic nation?

“That is not all. Suppose that the problem is solved, mobilization put into effect, and our troops occupy Berlin. Once you are there, what will you do? What concrete advantages would you reap from advancing on and occupying the German capital? It is possible, and even probable, that the German Government would follow the example set by the Russians when Napoleon marched on Moscow; it might retire elsewhere, perhaps to Königsberg. Would you follow it there? In that case, you would need untold forces.

“So, for the sake of an operation of very doubtful advantages, you would run all kinds of risks—concrete, inevitable risks. Are we to begin Napoleon’s errors

THE MARCH ON BERLIN

and follies over again? I consider that the contemplated action is highly imprudent and dangerous. I disapprove of it. I shall refuse to fall in with the scheme.'

"I had said enough. I never heard any more of a march on Berlin."

All great generals, despite their calmness, coolness and self-control, are vigorous, even fiery, of temperament. Only their will-power and strength of mind can discipline their instinctive violence. It was so with Foch.

I received strong proof of this one day from an anecdote he told me. It was a searchlight on his character.

"On August 20, 1914, when I was at the head of the magnificent 20th Corps which had just been victorious at Moranges, I was ordered to retreat. Such a command so filled me with sadness and indignation that for a moment I contemplated disobeying it. The longing flashed through my mind like lightning.

"It only lasted, of course, a few seconds. Reason and reflection quickly overcame my feelings. I understood that I was only part of a whole, and that the part may not aspire to command the whole."

XVII

FOCH ON THE UNITED STATES

JUST before leaving for the United States, where I was to deliver some political lectures at the Williamstown Institute, I called on Foch. I asked him for advice on the best way of speaking to Americans on European affairs, France's interests and demands, and the difficult problems before us.

"I like Americans," said Foch, "and I feel that there is absolute confidence between us. If I have any advice to give you, it is this: be objective and concrete in your lectures. Do not speak as though you were delivering a thesis. Americans quite rightly hate that. The best way of convincing them is to seem to avoid all efforts in that direction. If they feel that you have landed with a suit-case full of notes and arguments to convert them willy-nilly, they will immediately become all prickles, like the hedge-hog."

"The conduct of nations is determined by deep-seated motives on which reasoning has no effect. They are as they are, as geographical and historical factors have formed them, and you will not change them. England can be explained by her insulated position;

THE UNITED STATES

America by her isolation from Europe and her almost total ignorance of Continental affairs.

“As you know, I have travelled in the United States and stayed there for some time. I was greatly interested.

“The Americans are a fine people, and have succeeded very well in solving their ethnographical, social and political problems. They have also succeeded in a matter where France had to compromise; they have combined the two essential principles of good government: authority and liberty. They have recognized that freedom without authority is but an empty word, an illusion, a thing of unreality. Unlimited freedom can engender nothing but chaos.

“Their President is, during his four years of office, a genuine ruler. He can undertake a slow-moving task, give careful consideration to his plans and superintend their execution. He has not to reckon with intrigues and ambushes; politicians do not search for every means of ending his tenure so that they shall have a chance of taking his place. That, as you well know, is the plague-spot in our system.

“How on earth can you expect the head of a government to work, when he has to hear and answer questions two or three times a week, see some hundreds of deputies and senators who seek his favours, complain of prefects or sub-prefects and importune him

MARSHAL FOCH

with their squabbles and demands? Where can he find time to think and act? He is only a man, after all. He needs food and sleep as much as you and I. He can have no feeling of security or continuity. Fearing to be turned out at any moment, he perforce contents himself with treating questions as they arise, with no vision of the whole, and without allowing for expansion.

“I greatly admire the American constitution. Reliable observers have told me that their politicians are not so much better than our own, and that they often employ intrigue in order to get themselves elected. It is quite possible; but the form of their Government is such that the defects and wrongdoing of individual politicians cannot have such regrettable results as in our own country.

“In governments, as in men, continuous and lasting efforts are essential; a government must further be endowed with power, and an authority above vicissitudes and fluctuations.”

XVIII

FOCH ON GERMANY

IN dealing with Germany, you should never lose sight of the abominable manner in which she declared and waged the late War.

“Her conduct during the War was not accidental and unpremeditated. She followed a long-concerted plan. For many years her professors, philosophers and so-called thinkers inculcated the theory that she was superior to all other countries and therefore had the right to do with them whatever she would. The rules of morality, apparently, did not apply to Germany.

“We might well stop for a while at that basic question, and study it with all the care it merits. Here we have a nation which in its material civilization is incontestably great, very great. Yet for four years it conducted a savage and barbarous war; for four years it deliberately trampled on the most sacred principles of right, justice and humanity. How did such an anomaly come to pass? What caused it? What are its origins?

“When we seek those reasons, very little reflection will serve to unearth them. They are founded on the pernicious influence long exercised by Prussia over the

MARSHAL FOCH

whole of Germany. They are the effect of the intellectual and ethical poison with which Prussia inoculated the entire land. What, then, was the Prussian doctrine directly responsible for the War? On what principles did Prussia train the souls and bodies of her neighbours? What were the philosophical theories whereby she justified her instincts of loot and rapine?

“All her principles are based on one idea, namely: That right and morality are not the same for all, that there are privileged individuals who may deliver themselves from their shackles. It is a wicked theory; it cannot be too strongly opposed.

“From head to heel, Germany was tainted with this spirit. It assumed the importance of a dogma. She came to believe that she was the salt of the earth, the nation chosen by Providence to execute its designs. The worst means were sanctified by her if used to this end.

“Such a mentality explains everything. It inevitably led the Germans to grasp their weapons in 1914 at the call of William II.

“Germany was beaten, but the French, the English, the Americans, all the Allies, know what our victory cost us. We know the efforts and sacrifices involved in her overthrow. Now she has been brought to the ground. There she remains, counting the costs. But

FOCH ON GERMANY

what will she do in the years ahead of us? Her old rulers are discredited; will she find a new, beneficent government? Is she capable of good conduct? That would demand many years of effort from a people whom nothing has accustomed to self-government.

“There you have the country against which the Allies must take well-defined precautions.

“It is possible that its republican form of government will profoundly modify the German mentality. I devoutly hope so, but we cannot be sure. A well-organized, militarized Republic however, might be as great a menace to its neighbours as the old Empire—although as yet we have no proof that the Republic can establish itself firmly in Germany.

“We must not forget one of the direct causes of the War of 1914. Germany was tempted to injure the vital parts of her chief enemy, France, merely by stretching forth her hand. The prey was too tempting; it seemed so easy to conquer. Imperialist Germany was incapable of resisting. Henceforth such a temptation must not be held out to her. Her belligerent enterprises must be quelled by multiplying the obstacles in her path.

“That is what you may, what you *must*, tell America.”

XIX

A DARK HOUR IN FOCH'S LIFE: HE IS NEARLY "SHUNTED"

THE Marshal did not greatly care to allude to the subject; it was too full of pain and sorrow. Two or three times, however, he spoke of it.

As I was leaving him one evening, at about half-past six, he called me back.

"Where are you going? If you are not in too much of a hurry, I will come with you as far as the Rue de Grenelle."

He rang for his aide-de-camp and signed one or two documents. When we reached his car in the courtyard, he stopped.

"The weather is very fine. Do you mind if we walk?"

As we moved slowly along the Boulevard des Invalides, I spoke to him of that critical period towards the end of 1916 and the beginning of 1917 when, mainly for reasons of home politics, Joffre was recalled and France came near to being deprived of the services of Foch.

"Do you think," the Marshal asked point-blank, "that

A DARK HOUR

the public knows what happened, even in outline? What do you yourself know?"

"I went to Russia at the end of November, 1916, sir. I returned in August, 1917. So I can know only what I have heard. But all the same I know of two or three highly significant facts."

"What are those?" the Marshal asked, curiously.

"This, first of all, sir. In November, 1916, I lunched with you at your H.Q. at Villers-Bretonneux. You confided to me what had been the important results of your offensive; you said that the following year would see results still more important if the judicious methods then followed were still in force. Your confidence and calm, genuine optimism were at strange variance with all that I had heard at Paris. At that time there was a great gulf between the atmosphere of the Front and that of Paris, in spite of the short distance between the two places.

"While you and Joffre were tranquil and full of confidence, our political leaders were plunged in waves of indecision and depression.

"As I was leaving my home one morning, I met M. Viviani, then President of Council; he lived near me on the Boulevard de Courcelles, in the flat where I had often been before its owner and my friend, Gaston Calmette, was murdered by Mme. Caillaux.

MARSHAL FOCH

"‘I have a speech to prepare,’ said Viviani, ‘and I am going for a stroll in the Parc Monceau. If you have time, come part of the way with me.’

“Naturally, we talked of the War. I mentioned the strong opposition to Joffre and yourself, and said how much I regretted it.

“‘You do not know the whole truth,’ he said. ‘Foch is much more tired and ill than people think. And anyway, what is the good of such a man? He is a mystic.’”

Foch showed great interest in this.

“He said that?”

“He used those very words, sir, in one of the walks in the Parc Monceau.”

“What an extraordinary thing to say! What, in Heaven’s name, has mysticism to do with my nature and the command of troops?”

“That is what I asked him, sir. I added: ‘I know of no mind more objective and more concrete in its way of thinking than that of Foch. Clarity and realism are his essential traits. As for his health, frankly someone has been misleading you. I served under him during the battles of the Marne and the Yser, and a short time ago I spent a whole day in his company. Few men enjoy such consistent good health; the years leave no mark on his robustness. I hope that you and I will be as healthy at his age.’

A DARK HOUR

"I spoke more truly than I knew, for Viviani died a few years later at a comparatively early age.

"I was under the impression, however, that he had made up his mind. I think that he had been plied with tales about you and was only too happy to believe them. That state of mind was on the increase in Parliamentary circles, and was no doubt the reason for the semi-disgrace into which you fell shortly afterwards."

"When you want to kill your dog," said Foch, with great good humour, "you begin by saying it is mad. That is a very old rule to which there are few exceptions."

"I know also, sir, what my old friend, Admiral Lacaze, told me. He had been detailed, I believe, to give you hints of the Government's designs in regard to you."

"What did he tell you?"

"He said that as soon as he arrived to inform you of the Government's decision, you said in violent protest: 'I want to kill the Huns; I want to kill the Huns. If the Government wants to recall me from my command, let it do so; but it shall not lie and say I am ill.' He added that when the Government offered to send you to the rear, you flatly refused, demanding to be left in the van even if you were in command of the smallest unit."

"That is the exact truth," said Foch. "Everything

MARSHAL FOCH

happened as Lacaze told you. To remain at the Front, to escape being sent to the rear, I would have consented to lead a division, or even a brigade. There can be no degradation in leading French soldiers. In my opinion, whenever a general was offered an inferior command and refused it, he did very wrong. You should always accept the command offered to you when it is an active one. I would have taken over any command, however small, without hesitation. And I would have commanded it in such a way that I should soon have been given a more important one."

We had now arrived at his door.

"We must not think about it any more," said the Marshal. "All those bad old memories have vanished. Nations, like men, sometimes make grave mistakes."

My personal feeling in the matter was that the Marshal showed himself a true philosopher, and was far too ready to forgive injuries.

The mistake he mentioned might be forgiven with pardonable difficulty. It was committed by certain French politicians who, hidden from view in the dust of their own quarrels, lost sight of the interests of our country.

When the question arose of recalling Joffre from his command—which was a serious error—there were certain matters to be considered in choosing his successor.

A DARK HOUR

It would be mere illusion to think that these considerations were of military import. Of the two generals naturally fitted to succeed him, Foch, the first, was rejected because he went too often to Mass; also because, they said, he was ill—which was a lie; in addition to that, he was a mystic—which was idiotic. The other, Pétain, did not meet with approval because, it was said, he was of too domineering a nature; he refused to grant long interviews to politicians who interrupted his work and wasted his time.

Thanks to such stupidity, we came near to losing the War.

“It is always said,” Foch once remarked, “that France is the land of last-minute recoveries. Things have to be in a very bad state, and the illness must be at a crucial stage, before the doctor or surgeon is summoned. That is not a matter of which we may be proud. You might just as well set fire to a house for the pleasure of calling the firemen. Such experiments are very costly. They involve loss of life or money, and they are unreliable; for the time may come when these self-styled last-minute recoveries recover nothing at all.

“See what happened during the spring and summer of 1917 after we had made a bad beginning to an insufficiently-prepared offensive. There were mutinies in the Army. With great cleverness, prudence and de-

MARSHAL FOCH

cisiveness, Marshal Pétain established order and strengthened the shaken morale of the Army. Few chiefs could have so well fulfilled a difficult mission. It redounded greatly to his credit.

"But we must not forget that it would have been far better if we had not had to effect such a cure. What was the cause of the mutiny? Why was there a temporary weakening in the morale of our Army, which had hitherto been admirable? It resulted solely from the Nivelle régime and the unfortunate recall of Joffre. All the harm came from that. If Joffre had been maintained in his post, or if his successor had been more judiciously chosen, there would have been no mutiny."

XX

WHEN FOCH FIRST GLIMPSED VICTORY

I ASKED the Marshal at what period of 1918 he believed, contrary to current opinions, that victory might be won within the year.

"I very definitely thought so on July 24 or thereabouts, a few days after our successful counter-offensive at Villers-Cotterets. My belief is apparent in the notes I sent to the various commanders and in the instructions I issued.

"I certainly thought that the English and American troops would need reinforcements; a Commander-in-Chief should always foresee the worst. But I allowed for the possibility of final victory that year."

"Sir, de Mierry [one of his Staff Officers] has told me that when he was returning from the Front with you during the last week in July, you rubbed your hands and said: 'Well! Things are not too bad. I wonder if the Boches are not in a worse plight than we imagine. I was amazed at the ease and rapidity with which the Mangin-Degoutte counter-offensive penetrated their lines. Something has broken down in their machinery. We must attack them ceaselessly and

MARSHAL FOCH

leave them no breathing-space; and then the War may end earlier than we believe, during the last months of this year.'

"De Mierry added that he looked at you in astonishment and some scepticism, for everyone, at the Front, behind the lines and at home, believed in perfect faith that we should have at least another year of hostilities."

"My first impression of victory dates from that moment," said Foch. "It flashed before my eyes. Thenceforth I reckoned in my plans on such a possibility. What am I risking, after all? I asked myself. You can prepare for the worst and another year of fighting, but there is no crime in hoping for the best—a decisive victory within a few months.

"I remembered also what happened during the battle of the Marne. On the fourth day, on the evening of September 9, I had brought the 42nd Division from my left to my right; it was about to launch its counter-attack on the flank of the enemy when, to my joy and surprise, I learnt that the Germans had taken to flight. Why should not that occur again?

"When things begin to mend, you have only to persevere and you will be surprised to see that they get better and better—like a car increasing its speed as it proceeds on its journey."

XXI

VIEWS ON MILITARY HISTORY

A GOOD general," said Foch, "should have made a profound study and possess a thorough knowledge of military history. Napoleon, as you know, studied it with meticulous attention.

"The question is, how should it be examined and understood? It should be taken in all its details as given in accurate accounts; it is essential that the history of battles be studied in regard to the various scenes of operations; events should be ascribed to their causes; the movements of armies and the occurrences of the struggle should be followed. All that is necessary, but not sufficient.

"After the detailed review, a study of the whole is essential. After analysis comes synthesis. The details of operations must be linked to the general plan whence they originate. They must be relegated to their diverse positions. Then you must comprehend how such a plan came to be formed in the mind of its creator, and note the outstanding traits of his mind and temperament. That is the psychological, philo-

MARSHAL FOCH

sophical aspect of military history, and is fully as important as the technical side."

"The historian has indeed a hard task, sir, if he must evince a grasp of outline and details, a knowledge of military technique and the more delicate and difficult knowledge of the motives of men. I am not astonished that good military histories can be counted on the fingers of one hand."

"Most of those books," replied Foch, "are little more than average, because their writers lack some of the essential qualities I have just mentioned.

"In 1903, I left the Staff College, where I was a lecturer, and was appointed lieutenant-colonel of the 29th Artillery at Laon. I left somewhat abruptly. New influences were at work in the Army. Possibly, I was considered too religious; that I do not know. My friends said to me, half in joke and half in earnest: 'Now you have come to a stop; you may conceivably become a colonel, but you will never rise to the heights.' You can see how truly they spoke," said the Marshal, with his kindly smile.

"'What difference can it make to me?' I answered. 'I will do my duty to the end and then I shall settle down to an old age in the country.' For you must always do your duty to the best of your ability, without paying overmuch attention to the future. When a man has something in him—when he has guts, as they

VIEWS ON MILITARY HISTORY

say—circumstances, opportunities always arise for the display of his powers.

"When I arrived at Laon, so as not to be idle I took out my books and maps and was curious enough to study in all its detail the battle of Laon, fought by Napoleon in 1814 against the Russians and Prussians. It had always interested me. The more deeply I went into it the more interesting it became. I delivered a lecture on the subject to the gunners of my regiment; it was a success, for I received requests from all quarters to deliver it again.

"What was the whole affair? Let us imagine ourselves in March, 1814. Napoleon has just beaten an Austrian army under Schwartzenberg, who is retreating towards the East. Napoleon asks no better than to chase him at the point of the sword beyond the frontiers. For purely military reasons, such pursuit would be strongly advisable, for once Schwartzenberg is incapacitated, Blücher also will be compelled to retreat. Unfortunately, political considerations are opposed to military necessity. Circumstances forbid Napoleon to journey far from Paris, where exhaustion, faint-heartedness and disaffection are daily growing. He therefore decides to turn abruptly towards Blücher's army, which is retiring towards Laon.

"The Aisne is guarded for more than forty kilometres by the Prussian troops, but Napoleon crosses it

MARSHAL FOCH

by one of the shock tactics characteristic of his genius. His entire cavalry, closely followed by the infantry, captures the bridge of Berry-au-Bac, where defence is weakest, and forces its way across the river. The rest of the troops follow in its wake. This is Napoleon in his palmiest days. He sends for Marmont's army, now bivouacking in the neighbourhood of Rheims, near Athies. Marmont is tired and discouraged, for he has lost all hope of victory, and leads his troops in a languid fashion. He makes the serious mistake of bivouacking unguarded within range of the enemy. At night York and his Prussians fall furiously upon him. They completely shatter his army.

"In spite of this, Napoleon gives battle. For the whole of the day Blücher keeps to the heights, at the foot of the Colonne de Madame Eve. The heights of Laon, I do not need to tell you, dominate the surrounding country. It is a cold and windy region. Blücher, being very old (he is 72), is taken ill. By evening he is obliged to regain his H.Q. and take to his bed. He is ill, and almost blind. He transfers command to his Chief of Staff, Gneisenau. But he gives specific orders that all his troops shall profit by the unexpected event at Athies, Napoleon's failure, and their own numerical superiority, to launch a violent offensive against the few French soldiers.

"Gneisenau is a man of prudence and circumspec-

VIEWS ON MILITARY HISTORY

tion, and goes in great fear of Napoleon. He is in continual apprehension of a blow from the Imperial fist, and now fears a trap. He therefore takes it upon himself to revoke Blücher's orders and instructs the troops to abandon their pursuit. When York receives this counter-order, he loses his temper completely. So enraged is he that without a word he leaves his H.Q., literally deserts his troops and, accompanied by one officer, calmly withdraws to Brussels. When Blücher hears of this, he calls for writing materials. They bring him a pencil as thick as a stake, for he can scarcely see, and in his enormous, shaky, childish writing he scrawls a short note to York. 'Come back, my dear old York. History could never believe such a thing of us.'

"York cannot resist such an appeal from his companion in arms. He comes back. And operations begin again more fiercely than ever.

"What a fine utterance to come from the heart of an old soldier, whose moral strength and sacred enthusiasm over-ride everything else! 'Come back, my dear old York!' What power it holds! That is the main reason underlying Napoleon's defeat.

"The example is interesting, because it shows us vividly and minutely how, after studying events in detail and showing how they came to pass, we must link them up with the basic idea.

MARSHAL FOCH

"The basic idea in this case is the extraordinary enthusiasm and morale shown in 1814 by the armies united against Napoleon. Those factors explain everything.

"On the one side we have the allied armies, Prussians, Austrians and English, determined to end things by any and every means; on the other we have a general of undoubted genius and a nation exhausted after fifteen years of bleeding. There can be no doubt concerning the outcome.

"In 1918 the situation was reversed. The Allies, France, England, Belgium, Italy, and America, were resolved to end matters for Germany by every possible means. Ludendorff resembled Napoleon only in that he, too, led an exhausted, war-weary nation. The whole explanation lies in those factors.

"That is the inner sense of battles and warfare. The historian worthy of his calling should show it with all clarity. If he does not do so, he has failed in his object."

PART II

THE DRAMA OF THE PEACE TREATY

XXII

THE TWO ESSENTIALS

THE heading of this section did not emanate from myself. Foch often used the expression when discussing the treaty. He was perfectly justified in calling it a drama; rarely has there been one more tragic and more moving.

Foch, the great soldier in supreme command of the Allied Armies that he ultimately led through tribulation to victory, was convinced in his heart and mind that the victory was spoiled and wasted by the politicians and diplomatists—our own in particular. It was his firm belief that the means to which they resorted were bad, and that the results which they were content to produce were illusory; he saw France victorious, but, after all her sacrifices and loss, still without the two things to which she had sacred and constitutional rights: reparations and security.

He used all his strength and talents to protest against the treaty. He repeatedly uttered warnings. All in vain. Those whose duty it was to hear his reasons were determined not to pay attention to him. They would not even listen. Many times did Foch tell me

MARSHAL FOCH

of his efforts during those agitated times, developing in detail his theory and the arguments by which he supported it. He also allowed me to consult his notes to the Government and the documents of every sort from which they were compiled.

"My conscience is perfectly at rest," he said. "My affairs are in order for posterity to see. My notes and the official accounts of the meetings where I attempted to put forward my views bear testimony that I did my whole duty. I wish everyone could truthfully say as much.

"One day you will probably write down what I have told you. Do it as concisely and as objectively as you can; that is the only proper way. Then your readers can pass their own judgments, and decide whether I neglected any item that might have defended the interests of my country."

The following pages are an account of his talks on the subject. I reproduced the Marshal's words with all fidelity, and afterwards I submitted the manuscript to him. He bestowed his full approval on it.

"A few weeks before the Armistice, I requested Clemenceau to let me know the Government's views on what I then considered, on what I still believe to be, the vital point: our Rhineland policy. I needed that knowledge. An armistice automatically brings

THE TWO ESSENTIALS

about peace. A firm hold on the Rhine was essential to both.

“You know how I was sent about my business and advised to devote myself to my own affairs. Yet by putting the question to the Government—a question entirely devoid of indiscretion—I was really doing it a great service. For if it had been willing to give me an answer, it would first have been obliged to debate the matter itself and give definite form to its views on this vital point.

“It was indispensable to shape precise opinions thereon. From the phrase ‘I am waging war’ evolves an excellent but incomplete programme; for no one embarks on war for war’s sake, but solely to bring about peace. Even during a war, there is nothing to prevent one from considering the intricacies of establishing peace; especially was this the case then, when our affairs were progressing so favourably.

“Those whose duty it was to draw up the Peace set to work with all imaginable slowness. There were receptions, festivities, official visits, banquets and speeches—and all that time serious business was needing attention. The delay was to cost France dear. The questions of most import to us, reparations and security, became increasingly difficult to settle favourably.

“The Armistice was twice renewed.

“When I saw that negotiations for the treaty were

MARSHAL FOCH

dragging on interminably, I proposed that the urgent needs of France should be satisfied by immediately determining Germany's frontiers and immediately gauging her indemnities at one hundred milliards of marks, divisible among the Allies according to their most pressing requirements. The sum was to be paid within a fixed period, and until payment was made we were to hold substantial pledges. Once that point was gained, most of the difficulty would vanish, and the rest of the problem be relatively easy."

"Do you know, sir, that the Germans themselves were prepared for demand for that very sum, cash down, as the English say? I have often been told so during my many post-War visits to Germany. They were astonished that such a demand was not made. If they had been the victors instead of the Allies, they would most certainly have adopted that procedure, with increased stringency. And one hundred milliard marks were proposed by the Americans as a suitable indemnity when the amount of reparations was being settled."

"However," Foch continued, "no notice whatsoever was taken of a demand so reasonable. Negotiations began—and began badly. I soon perceived that, in the vital matter of security—a question on which it was my right and duty to give an opinion, since I had been given the honourable mission of leading the Allies to

THE TWO ESSENTIALS

victory—in that matter France was obtaining none of the guarantees of safety indispensable to her. They gave her not realities but phantoms and fakes.

"It was all in our interests to make known at the earliest possible moment the nature of our two foremost demands, reparations and security. They should have been made public. They were legitimate demands and could astonish no one. Our cards should have been laid on the table. There was no advantage in hiding them, and there were several drawbacks attached to such a course.

"England had set us an example early in the negotiations by setting down her demands and indicating that she would tolerate no bargaining and no compromise. The German Navy, the German colonies, and the freedom of the seas, as she understood it, were what concerned her most. She exacted the reorganization of the German Navy in such a manner that she would have nothing to fear from Germany on the seas not only for the present, but for twenty, thirty or fifty years to come. She also insisted that Germany should relinquish her colonies.

"Those demands were far from being moderate; they were colossal. Few people have sufficiently stressed that point, which is strange, for it is worthy of thought.

"The greater portion of the German fleet left intact

MARSHAL FOCH

by the British squadrons was forced to deliver itself into the hands of England. The sacrifice was great in its material and moral aspects—and how humiliating! History can offer no analogy for such a cession. Sedan was nothing, in comparison. And England did not limit herself to the navy, but took unto herself the best items of Germany's commercial fleet.

"What can be said about the German colonies? Germany had made great efforts and great sacrifices to found an immense empire, scattered throughout the world. Germany, as much over-populated as England if not more so, could reasonably say that she needed colonies as much as England herself. But they were taken from her nevertheless. Her remonstrances were ignored. The matter was not even discussed. As soon as the demands were made they were satisfied. England at once obtained all she wanted on the two matters essential to her.

"England incontestably played a very important part in gaining the victory; so did France. The efforts and sacrifices she made were very great; ours were no less; far from it.

"In those circumstances, why were not the urgent demands of France taken into consideration also? England had suffered no reserve or restriction in safeguarding herself by sea. Why should France not have the same security on land? We need it as much as, if

THE TWO ESSENTIALS

not more than, England. For, after all, the German Navy was greatly inferior to her own, and had never constituted a serious menace to England. On the other hand, if Germany's army was to be reconstituted, France, after being invaded three times within the century, would be still in direct danger.

"England at once brought her demands into the open. As soon as negotiations started, she laid them down as axioms beyond discussion. France had everything to gain in doing likewise. But in order to do so, she needed a settled policy and instant knowledge of what she wanted. These, unhappily, she lacked. All the numerous, grave imperfections and omissions in the Peace Treaty are mainly due to the initial error, our lack of precision and decisiveness."

"I can corroborate that, sir, by a very curious and interesting interview I once had with M. Pichon, the Minister of Foreign Affairs at the end of January, 1919.

"I had been demobilized two days previously, and was about to take over the foreign side of the *Figaro*, which had been in my charge for several years before the War. Before writing my first article, I went for information to Pichon with whom I have always been on terms of friendliness and even intimacy.

"I questioned him on the work of the Conference. He spoke freely and frankly of the future boundaries of

MARSHAL FOCH

Czechoslovakia and Yugo-Slavia, and about the League of Nations.

"I immediately asked him the question foremost in my mind: 'What about Germany's boundaries? That is of more interest to us.'

"He became nervous and reserved. In vain I bombarded him with queries.

"'The thoughtful and clear-sighted part of the public,' I told him, 'is beginning to express its astonishment that France has not yet made her demands known. One would almost say that she is reluctant to unveil them, and yet she has nothing to hide. Her silence is not making a good impression.'

"'M. Clemenceau has his plans and the public must trust him,' said M. Pichon, rather annoyed.

"I ventured, on the strength of our long acquaintance, to hint that a plan founded on delay might not prove flawless. At this the Minister became angry.

"'You know nothing of the difficulties under which we are labouring,' he said.

"As I had known him for many years, I knew that when he became angry it was, nine times out of ten, because he was unable for weighty reasons to justify his attitude.

"From that moment Pichon, with his customary keenness of observation, must have seen that we were

THE TWO ESSENTIALS

on the wrong path and that France was in danger of not obtaining the security to which she was entitled. But the influence of his chief, M. Clemenceau, made it impossible for him to remonstrate or criticize."

XXIII

FOCH'S PRINCIPLES

YOU know my theory," said Foch, "I have explained it not once, but ten times.

"At the end of a war that cost them so much in men and money, I believed, and I still believe, that France and Belgium needed strongly established frontiers to protect them for all time from any possible aggression on the part of Germany.

"Germany, by reason of her ever-increasing population and the militarist spirit that will always manifest itself whether she be a republican or a monarchist Germany, constitutes a menace all the greater because there is no Russia to counterbalance her. The only natural barrier between us is the Rhine. Whoever holds its bridges is master of the situation; he can easily repulse invasion, and, if attacked, carry the war into the enemy's country.

"Any other frontier is bad for us, and can give us illusory safety, but not genuine security. The Rhine frontier has an additional advantage, in that the river may be adequately guarded by small forces, which

FOCH'S PRINCIPLES

would enable France and Belgium to reduce their armies accordingly.

"Those were the outstanding features of the theory I vainly tried to make the French Government adopt. They are closely linked together and form a unity. They are one, simple and clear.

"With untiring energy and resolution, I pointed out each of its advantages. I pleaded my theory in all its diverse aspects so that it might be as striking and convincing as possible. It was a battle in which my only weapons were my authority, my prestige and the force of my arguments. They proved insufficient. Deaf to my warnings and appeals, M. Clemenceau lightly, imprudently, abandoned the main line of resistance. He came to terms on the vital point. He accepted a compromise, a bargain, in which we could not fail to be worsted.

"My arguments are explained in detail in the three notes I laid before the French and Allied Governments, dated November 28, 1918, January 10, 1919, and March 31, 1919. I summarized and repeated all the arguments I used at the famous Council of Ministers when, in the presence of the other French delegates, I dramatically uttered my last warning and besought the Government, for the last time, not to consent to a peace by which France was deprived of her essential rights.

"Besides showing you those documents, I will let you

MARSHAL FOCH

see all the notes and personal research-work on which I based my theory, so that it may be seen to be founded on reflection and the study of history. More than anything else, I want the part I played to be clearly set forth.

“My first memorandum shows what I believed to be the essential facts in the problem of our security. Ignoring incidentals, as I always do, I came at once to the point: troops.

“That point dominated all others. In material resources, aptitude in war and the military spirit, France and Germany could be reckoned equals. As for the value of the Supreme Command, in 1870 it produced brilliant decisive results on the German side, and in 1918 it performed the same services for us. So that the question of troops, in those circumstances, is of unrivalled importance.

“Germany, if deprived of the Posen region, Alsace-Lorraine and Schleswig, would still number more than sixty million inhabitants. France (together with Alsace-Lorraine), Belgium and Luxembourg combined amount to a bare fifty millions. That is to say, the Germans outnumber us by ten millions at present, which numerical superiority would increase by reason of the high German birth-rate.

“The situation, then, would be appreciably more perilous for us after the War than it had been previously.

FOCH'S PRINCIPLES

During the first three years of hostilities, Russia absorbed a goodly proportion of the German forces. Thanks to her, the Allies possessed superiority of numbers on the Western Front, which they lost when Russia collapsed. Only the arrival of the American troops allowed us to level the difference and win the War. Those are the essential facts that must not be lost sight of.

“For many years to come, we can have no reliance on Russia. On the contrary, in certain circumstances the Red armies may coalesce with those of Germany.

“What means have the Allies of counterbalancing this inferiority? They have this: a natural frontier, the Rhine, on the left bank of which they may station garrisons.

“The effectiveness of the frontier depends largely on the organization of the land along the left bank. Here, as so often happens, military and political problems fuse and become one. In peace and in war, we find it impossible to keep them apart. Any effort at an arbitrary separation of the two, being contrary to logic and common sense, is certain to result in the gravest difficulties and complications.

“We must therefore brook no delay in organizing that part of the Rhineland to be permanently freed from Prussian domination. It is at the same time a

MARSHAL FOCH

pledge that the Allies may hold until their just demands for payment have been satisfied.'

"This note, marked *very urgent*, I sent to the plenipotentiaries of the Allies.

"It should be observed that the question of the proper boundaries of France and Belgium was not broached. The note dealt solely with the collective, international European pledge necessary to the Allies; since they had fought together against Germany, they wished to safeguard themselves adequately against her.

"In other words, I was careful not to look at the Rhine question exclusively from the Franco-Belgian angle. I raised it to the status of an international European matter. The watch on the Rhine was not to be kept only by the French and Belgian soldiers, but by Allied forces as well. It would not require numerous troops to prevent Germany from embarking on a war of revenge.

"I laid all possible stress on the inter-Allied, international aspect. There you have your best answer to those who accuse France of pursuing her own interests and intending to annex the Rhineland. In my view, the Rhine is the frontier not of France but of all the nations who fought with her in defence of the right."

XXIV

ERRORS COMMITTED BY LEADING STATESMEN

WE were speaking one day of the Peace Conference and trying to analyze the various reasons for its faulty organization and deplorable results.

“One of the chief reasons,” said the Marshal, “was the decision of the heads of the Allied Governments to conduct negotiations themselves. No arrangement could be more regrettable, more full of disadvantages and risks. The Prime Minister of England, the Presidents of Council of France and Italy and the President of the United States—to whom American ministers are ultimately responsible, since he is both head of the State and of the Government—there you have the protagonists of an assembly convoked to reorganize nearly the whole world.

“In each of those countries, the head of the Government was already sufficiently preoccupied with domestic politics and the various problems that arose after the War. In addition to that, each minister was obliged to tear himself from increasingly urgent matters to

MARSHAL FOCH

participate in diplomatic discussions that could not but last months, even if things went well. The absurdity of it all!

"Thus torn between the complicated negotiations at Rheims and the political battles raging in Washington, London and Rome, the august Jacks-of-all-trades were forced to a bad compromise. From time to time they had to abandon negotiations to plunge into domestic politics and give for a while their undivided attention to home duties.

"President Wilson arrived in Europe on December 14. That might seem to you a favourable moment for setting to work. But just then Lloyd George was concerned about his elections, which were timed for December 29. More than a month passed before the Conference was officially opened. As soon as discussions began, Wilson was obliged to abandon them in order to leave for America, whence he returned only on March 14.

"Such occurrences were not conducive to speed and facility of negotiations.

"It is essential to note that it was France who paid most dearly for these delays. As the weeks and months rolled by, there was less and less chance of her obtaining the reparations and security she asked for and needed. As victory was left further and further behind, so we were running proportionately greater risk

ERRORS BY STATESMEN

of differing from our Allies, especially England—on account of divergent interests.

"Taking into consideration the inevitable delays and the personalities of the negotiators, it was all the more necessary for France to state, as soon as possible, what she considered an irreducible minimum for security and reparations. The Wilson-Lloyd George coalition should have been prevented at all costs from working against us. The French scheme, namely the constitution of the Rhine as Germany's military frontier, was certain to provoke lively opposition from the English. Once Germany had been beaten, England was sure to revert instinctively to her traditional policy of checking the victor—in this case, France—from becoming over-powerful.

"If we were to have the English against us, all the more reason for trying to bring the Americans over to our side, or, failing that, to secure their neutrality.

"Only on March 14, the day of President Wilson's return, did M. Clemenceau develop the French theory of security that had already been unsuccessfully made known to the English. On this occasion the President and Lloyd George were both present.

"I was not one of the official French delegates at the Conference. The Government had decided that my post as inter-Allied Commander-in-Chief prevented me from holding any such position. That is why I was

MARSHAL FOCH

not present at the opening session. On that day, January 18, at ten-thirty, M. Pichon telephoned to the effect that the President and himself agreed that it was preferable for me not to attend.

"In the meantime, the Armistice had been renewed twice. When, after it had been renewed for a third time, I returned from Trèves, I sent an urgent note to M. Clemenceau.

"No one else had any clear idea of the danger in delaying the establishment of Germany's military frontiers. All attention was centred on disarming her, which was in its way excellent. But the disarmament of Germany, however much zeal and activity were put into it—and no one exerted more than I—could produce only temporary relative results.

"There was danger in expecting more from it.

"It is really extraordinary that M. Clemenceau did not think of me in the first place as a suitable person to overcome the resistance of President Wilson and Lloyd George. He was fortunate in that the Supreme Commander who led the Allied Armies to victory was a Frenchman. Neither Lloyd George nor Wilson could be surprised that the *generalissimo* should give his opinion on military matters; and the future security of France and the Allies, as well as the avoidance of more aggression from Germany, who had willed and lost the War, were eminently military in nature. It was

ERRORS BY STATESMEN

the right and the duty of a commander to express his views. France's representative at the Conference could use him to illustrate his theory and overcome resistance. He could say: 'I am obliged to accede to Foch in all that pertains to security. Foch will not hear of any solution other than the Rhine as a military frontier. Anything you could offer us in exchange—the disarmament of Germany, pacts, temporary occupation—he considers entirely inadequate. I cannot ignore his resistance or combat his state of mind. For it is obvious that on this point he has the country at his back.'

"That appeared to me an extremely powerful argument, a force that, if well utilized, could be productive of great results. I still wonder why such a force was not employed. Lloyd George could not take offence because M. Clemenceau invoked the opinion of his country; he was constantly doing so himself. I cannot understand the influences at work. It may have been jealousy of the Army, or the fear of seeing a general meddle in diplomacy, or a desire to uphold the supremacy of the statesman.

"In matters of such gravity, there should be no question of anything but the interests of our country, to safeguard whom the military and diplomatists should work in amity."

In Foch's last words and his manner as he uttered them, there was an element of abnegation and nobility

MARSHAL FOCH

by which I was deeply impressed. He felt no annoyance. He did not once lose his temper with those who ignored his warnings and cast away the influence, authority and prestige they could have put to such good use. He needed to see clearly into everything, and urged by his need, he merely tried to analyze the state of their minds. That was all.

XXV

THE TWO THEORIES CONTRASTED

THE French Government had at first decided to adopt my theory. M. Clemenceau resolved to maintain it before our Allies, and instructed M. Tardieu to prepare a memorandum for them. It was lengthy, exhaustive and accurate, and dealt with the question in its historical, military and diplomatic aspects. It showed that neither the proposed disarmament of Germany nor the League of Nations could give France the security she so urgently needed. Its conclusions were that Germany should be bounded on the west by the Rhine, and that the bridges of the river should be held by an inter-Allied force. In military matters the memorandum was confined to a summary of my arguments. It was followed by two appendices, one dealing with the policy to be pursued with regard to an independent Rhineland state, the other outlining the economic situation resulting from its independence.

"When the memorandum was presented for the first time to the American delegates, Colonel House in the first place, then President Wilson, it appears that they

MARSHAL FOCH

raised no serious objections. Opposition was to come later, and was due largely to the intrigues and insistence of the English.

"As might have been expected, our demands immediately met with lively opposition from that quarter. It is obvious to anyone with a knowledge of English political traditions that England would not view with a favourable eye the military establishment of France on the Rhine, even as accredited representative of the Allies. Neither would she approve of a Rhineland separated from Germany and therefore disposed to gravitate, politically and economically, within the orbit of France. To England it implied an enfeebled Germany confronted with an over-powerful France. The balance of power in Europe, for centuries the A B C of England's statesmen, might be endangered.

"Only cold resolution on our part could overcome such strong opposition. We should have done all that was possible to prevent an Anglo-American pact. We should have impressed on England our determination not to compromise in the elementary matter of our safety—that is to say, regarding the Rhine frontier—any more than she herself had yielded concerning the German Navy and colonies and the freedom of the seas.

"The discussions held during the first fortnight of March between the representatives of England and France served only to emphasize the irreconcilable op-

TWO THEORIES CONTRASTED

position between the two theories. The English admitted that France had the right and the duty to safeguard herself against Germany. They agreed with us as to our end, but they disapproved of our means. They alleged that the military occupation of the Rhine and the creation of an independent Rhineland state could not give us the expected results.

“That was our opportunity for asking them: ‘Have you anything to offer us in exchange?’ The English had foreseen the objection and straightway prepared the answer delivered to us a few days later.

“As soon as President Wilson arrived in France, discussions were resumed. Almost at once the English and Americans, who were in obvious combination against us, put forward their solution: Instead of the Rhine as a military frontier and an independent Rhineland state, they offered us a treaty of alliance guaranteeing us against any unjustified aggression on the part of Germany.”

XXVI

THE CRITICAL MOMENT

THUS we come to the gravest and most moving period of the Conference," said Foch sadly. "The destiny of France, and of Europe itself, were in the balance. The proposition was fired point-blank at M. Clemenceau. Then was the moment to weigh it with scrupulous care. What exactly was it worth? We were asked to abandon the solid reality of a military frontier and accept in its place an alliance. What was the value of the alliance?

"One question should immediately have leapt to the minds of our negotiators: Whatever the importance of the President of the United States, is he entitled thus to pledge the word of his country? The American constitution exacts ratification of all treaties of alliance by two-thirds of the Senate. According to all precedents, such a majority has been extremely difficult, if not impossible, to obtain. That difficulty in practice prevents the President from contracting any such treaty. So all Americans proclaim. If our representatives at the Conference had been capable of forgetting it—which seems very unlikely—our ambassador at

THE CRITICAL MOMENT

Washington would certainly not have omitted to recall the fact. They should have been all the more on their guard because England took great care not to sign the treaty until the American signature had been appended.

"All that, you will admit, was not very promising. We should have opened our eyes to facts and said: 'Their offers may possibly be of very little value.'

"Supposing the treaty of alliance to be ratified by both countries, did it afford us the adequate security which we sorely needed? For an answer to that question you need only consult the history of the last War. How long did it take England and, naturally, how much longer did it take America, to transport to us troops capable of taking a decisive part in battle?

"These objections, although so strong that they were overwhelming, were not long sustained, even if made at all, by our representatives. Shortly afterwards, as a consultation of dates will show, they decided to accept the principle of the exchange. By such a bargain they consented to abandon, not all, but the major part of, their demands. They retired from their front to a secondary line bristling with disadvantages. They renounced the Rhine as a permanent barrier, and an independent Rhineland state, and henceforth devoted all their efforts to making their new propositions palatable. They now demanded a temporary occupation of fifteen years' duration, involving retreats every five

MARSHAL FOCH

years and allowing for the possibility of reoccupation in the event of German infringement of the treaty.

"The possibility of reoccupation was obviously of value to us. It was concrete, but so conditional and precarious that we were but slightly recompensed for the sacrifices we had made. A temporary occupation, even if prolonged by circumstances, could not solve our problem; it merely deferred their solution. Instead of settling the question once and for all, between France and the Allies quite as much as between Germany and France, it left the matter in suspense. It inevitably led us along a path beset with difficulties, differences and quarrels, with Germany and with our Allies. Who would decide whether or not the treaty were infringed? France alone? Or France and the Allies? How could we hope that the good feeling between the latter and ourselves would last indefinitely? Such a hope was contrary to all good sense. When the War ended, the bond forged by common efforts and sacrifices necessarily ended with it. Each nation, whether Allied or not, went its way, taking up the threads of its more ordinary existence and its former individuality."

XXVII

FOCH'S APPEAL

IHAD only an imperfect knowledge of current events," said Foch. "It may be said without exaggeration that the Government and the principal participants were careful to keep all information from me.

"It was exceedingly ill-judged of them. They would have reaped every advantage from keeping me informed. They would have profited still more greatly by availing themselves of my services in order to offer more resistance to the exigencies of the English and Americans. My position in regard to our Allies, especially the English, would have enabled me to combat them vigorously as occasion arose.

"But I knew enough to perceive that the nation was being dragged along the top of a precipice. The solution which with growing insistence I had proposed to the Government was at first accepted with promises of support, in the letter and the spirit. It was essentially simple. In it the various elements were closely linked, but if one of the links were omitted the whole chain would lose its strength.

MARSHAL FOCH

"I proposed a solid basis for the new, post-War Europe: Germany permanently bounded on the west by the Rhine, and the Rhine held by a small Allied force; the creation of an independent Rhineland state separating France from Germany, similar to England's creation of Belgium, who has survived and thriven. What had we in place of that plan? A scheme for an hypothetical and conditional alliance by which, at best, we could receive no immediate military protection; and a temporary occupation, the main drawback of which was its indecisiveness. Great foresight and intelligence were not necessary for immediate discernment of all the flaws in such a combination. Instead of taking a firm stand—and we were in an excellent position to do so—we weakened, bargained, compromised. I was speedily convinced that we would not come off best in the deal.

"Now, the question of security was primarily my concern, since I had led the Allied Armies to victory. I might not be consulted on other matters, but on this point I was determined to make myself heard by the Allied Governments as well as by our own. I resolved to do my utmost in opposing so disastrous a proposition.

"On March 30 I wrote an urgent letter to the President of Council. I told him that before leaving for Spa on April 2 I wanted, before matters went deeper, to give my opinion on the necessity for a permanent mili-

FOCH'S APPEAL

tary frontier between the countries of Western Europe.

"In the evening, M. Clemenceau informed me that he would submit my request on the following day to the members of the Conference, and ask that the Commander of the Allied Armies be heard without delay.

"The hearing was granted, and took place on the afternoon of March 31. You know me well enough to be sure that I never trust to improvisations. They must be left to those in the trade, politicians and lawyers. I arrived with a memorandum which I read to the heads of four governments. In a clear summary, I repeated and recapitulated the arguments of my previous notes. I proved that only the Rhine could protect us against a mass invasion by seventy million Germans, possibly swelled by hordes of Slavs.

"All other projects were bad or inadequate, I proceeded to say. The neutrality of the Rhineland provinces would not prevent Germany from being the first to seize the bridges on the Rhine. The river once crossed, her difficulties would be over. For the French and Belgians the loss of the Rhine would be equivalent to the loss of a great battle. They could then only concentrate on their own inadequate frontiers, which are powerless to stem invasions.

"Could any possible alliance be compensation for the strategic and numerical inferiority of the Allies? Certainly not, was my answer. Weeks and months must

MARSHAL FOCH

pass before England or America could send contingents to our help. In 1914 France was saved, and England gained time to prepare her armies, only because Russia engaged on her frontiers a great portion of the German troops.

“Since that counterweight no longer existed, the barrier of the Rhine was all the more indispensable.

“I tried to arrange my arguments in close, rapid succession, as if they were troops about to charge. I reasoned quickly and hotly. Taking the question as a whole, I showed that by abandoning the Rhine France would in a measure commit suicide, although there was no principle in the world that enjoined upon her self-destruction.

“The Rhine is to-day, a barrier indispensable to the safety of Western Europe—indispensable, therefore, to civilization. In any case, there is no principle by which a victorious nation can be forced to restore the means of her own security to her enemy. After a free people has paid for her independence by more than a million and a half corpses and unparalleled devastation, no principle in the world can force her to live in perpetual fear of her neighbour, and to have alliances as her sole resources against disaster. No principle can prevail over a nation’s right to existence, or over the right of France and Belgium to secure independence.”

“I concluded by saying: ‘By renouncing the Rhine as

FOCH'S APPEAL

a natural barrier, we should be conniving at an inconceivable, a monstrous situation. Germany would be able to continue her enterprises as though she had been victorious—the very Germany that has sent millions of human beings to death, the very Germany that planned to annihilate our country and leave her a heap of ashes, the very Germany that plotted to dominate the world by brute force—blood-stained, crime-stained Germany.'

"I adjured the Allied Governments, who in their darkest hours had committed the care of their armies and the future of their cause to my hands, instantly to recognize that their future could be stabilized only by the Rhine as a military frontier and its occupation by the Allies. I urged on them the necessity of such a settlement."

XXVIII

A TRAGIC SITUATION

I WAS at pains, as you see, to put great precision, logical force and fire into my reasoning. I believe that if those who listened to me had not been beyond conviction, I should indeed have persuaded them. But they were no longer open to conviction; they had pledged themselves in other directions and could not disown their promises. Therein lay the tragedy of the situation. M. Clemenceau had accepted the exchange in principle. He had been offered a pact of alliance, in consideration for which he relinquished the major portion of our demands. The nature of the exchange could no longer be debated; only in its degree could it be discussed.

“But I was determined to leave nothing undone that might prevent so hateful a conclusion. Materially, I could do nothing. I only had my moral authority, which, had it been well utilized, could have produced important results; but the head of the French Government was now steadfastly resolved not to avail himself of it. I unhesitatingly threw it into the balance. I addressed my arguments to everyone, the Allies, the

A TRAGIC SITUATION

French Government, the President of France, the Presidents of our two Houses of Parliament, and others. Firmly and in all loyalty, I pointed out to them that the acquisition they contemplated was worthless.

"M. Clemenceau is of a domineering, dictatorial temperament, and grew more and more irritated by the opposition he discerned in me. He was set upon ignoring it. For form's sake, it was incumbent upon him, in view of my persistence, to give me a hearing on two or three occasions. But he refused to pay any heed to me.

"But I wanted to plead my theories once more, and protest with all my might against the decision then in the making. As I had great respect for discipline and duty, I made up my mind to do and say nothing that could lay me open to reproach. But I was bent on doing all I could to obtain modifications in the prospective treaty.

"I assure you that nothing could be more dramatic, or more painful to me, than the course of my efforts from my appearance before the Big Four on March 31 to the famous session of the Council of Ministers on April 25, when at my urgent request I was permitted to state my views before all the members of the French Government and the French delegates to the Conference.

MARSHAL FOCH

"On April 6, a week after my last note to the Big Four, I returned to the charge and wrote to the President of Council. 'As discussions between the heads of the Allied Governments progress,' I wrote, 'undertakings may be made which cannot afterwards be disowned. It therefore seems to me imperative that I should meet the French delegates in order to know the exact state of affairs.'

"My letter infuriated M. Clemenceau. Three days later, on April 9, he answered it in a disagreeable vein. First of all, he declared it was impossible to discuss the question of my status in regard to the Conference. As Supreme Commander I was under the authority of the Allied powers. As such, he added, I had the right to speak and air my views, but not to deliberate with the French delegates. Only the Government could deliberate. The Government alone would hear me on all questions of a military nature. M. Clemenceau concluded by saying that when a temporary draft of sufficient clarity had been drawn up by the heads of Governments, he would invite me to explain my theories before the Council of Ministers, in the presence of the French delegates.

"A whole week elapsed. Receiving no news, and feeling that at that stage of negotiations it was only a matter of days before the pact was to be signed, on

A TRAGIC SITUATION

April 15 I wrote another letter to M. Clemenceau. I asked him to summon me before the Council of Ministers and the French delegates, before the prolongation of negotiations should bring forth definite undertakings.

"I added two or three sentences every term of which I had scrupulously weighed. I gave him fully and clearly to understand that I disapproved of the prospective compromise.

"I said that a fifteen years' occupation of the Rhineland and withdrawals every five years seemed to me, from the military point of view, totally unacceptable by France. It would leave us in utter insecurity, both for the defence of our territory and the payment of indemnities. We ought therefore to insist on the Rhine as a barrier, which would take far fewer troops than any other frontier.

"Two days later I had received no answer. So I again returned to the charge. This time I wrote to the President of the Republic himself. I asked him to convene a meeting either of the Council of Ministers or of the French delegates, so that the vital question of the Rhineland might be thoroughly examined. I said that such a meeting might liquidate the fundamental differences that appeared to exist between the peace conditions then preparing and those which I believed to constitute France's only means of security. Everyone,

MARSHAL FOCH

I added, would then recognize and shoulder his own responsibility.

"The President intimated to me on the following day through General Pénelon that he had brought my letter to the notice of the President of Council. M. Clemenceau, he said, declared that it was impossible for him to convene an immediate meeting of the Council of Ministers to hear me. He would summon me as soon as he was ready and nothing definite would be done beforehand.

"At that very time M. Clemenceau was discussing with President Wilson and Lloyd George the details of our temporary occupation of the Rhineland. He had accepted it in principle some time earlier. His efforts were now directed towards uniting the other two protagonists in their views. The French Government had already entered into solemn engagements by accepting the principle of the new settlement; it would be difficult to maintain the contrary. So that even had they wished to cry off their bargain, they would certainly have found it very hard to do so.

"I was perfectly sensible of that. Nevertheless, I was determined to increase my efforts. However small the chance of preventing a settlement I considered disastrous, it was not to be wasted.

"Even if, in spite of my efforts, this settlement were effected, there now arose the question of responsibility

A TRAGIC SITUATION

before posterity, to which my idea of duty and conscientious scruples led me to attach great importance.

“I was convinced then—and my conviction has not since faltered—that the treaty then in the making, which I was not allowed to modify, was bad for the safety of France. Very bad. It was full of flaws, it was fundamentally wrong, and cannot fail one day to have the worst results. On the day when it is apparent in all its evil, when France perceives that her interests were improperly defended, she will rise in deep anger against those who so imperfectly handled that defence.

“Before that day comes, it is only just that all misunderstandings should be elucidated and the responsibility of each participant determined as clearly and as definitely as possible.

“I am resolved to set down my share in the proceedings. I want it to be proved beyond dispute at the bar of History that I did all I could and neglected no opportunity of opposing that hateful settlement. That is why I asked for a hearing by the Council of Ministers. I persisted in my requests until they were granted, so that I might be heard by the ministers in whose power it lay to make definite decisions, and who ultimately adhered to the plan proposed by their President.

“M. Poincaré, the President of the Republic, was himself in entire agreement with me. That made the situation still more dramatic. He, too, was convinced that

MARSHAL FOCH

the proposed treaty sacrificed the essential interests of France, and deprived her of the only adequate frontier to which she could and should lay claim. M. Poincaré had repeatedly written and spoken to that effect with all possible clearness to M. Clemenceau.

"No more heed was paid to his objections than to mine."

XXIX

FOCH BEFORE THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

ON April 25 I spoke before the specially convened meeting of the Council of Ministers. Besides the President of the Republic and all the members of the Government, those French delegates to the Conference who were not also ministers were present: namely, MM. Jules Cambon and Tardieu. General Weygand accompanied me.

"The meeting was declared open, and M. Clemenceau stated that although I had already been heard by the heads of Governments, I wished to be heard also by the Council of Ministers before we definitely entered upon any engagements. He himself, he proceeded to say, had intimated to the heads of the Allied Governments that he would not formally accept the prospective treaty until the meeting had taken place. The question was therefore still open, and he accordingly invited me to express my views.

"I acted on my pet formula: What is the gist of the matter? I demanded to be acquainted with the draft drawn up by the heads of Governments, in accordance with the President of Council's letter to me on April 9.

MARSHAL FOCH

Before discussing the draft I said I had to learn its purport.

"It was perfectly logical and natural, you will agree. But M. Clemenceau vetoed all discussion. The Council of Ministers would merely listen to me. Deliberation was the Government's business and outside my province. The President of the Republic was of the same opinion.

"At that moment M. Poincaré—who, we must not forget, was in his innermost heart in entire agreement with me—pointed out that he understood that the provisional draft had been communicated to me so that I could give my opinion of it.

"I have not the right to make the draft known," M. Clemenceau replied, bluntly, "but I can give a general idea of its contents. It deals with the Rhine frontier."

"As I wanted everything to be exact, I read the correspondence between the President of Council and myself. In his letter of April 9 was the word 'deliberate,' which had led me to believe that the military conditions of peace would be discussed in my presence. I demanded an official account of the present proceedings so that there might be no doubt as to the actual words spoken.

"M. Clemenceau replied that that was against the rules of the Council of Ministers.

BEFORE THE COUNCIL

"The President of the Republic intervened a second time, to observe that the rule did not necessarily apply in this case, since the meeting was not an ordinary one by reason of the presence of the French delegates to the Conference. It was then decided that General Weygand had the right to take notes.

"M. Clemenceau declared that he would not allow discussion or deliberation in my presence. If any were to take place, he would withdraw. Marshal Foch, he said, was there to give his opinion, and that was all.

"He thereupon gave the outlines of the position. Marshal Foch deemed it necessary to maintain a permanent occupation of the Rhine. He himself believed that France should remain within her old frontiers and be content with the Anglo-American alliance. In that case, the Rhineland would be occupied until Germany paid; we would relinquish territory at stated periods, and if she did not pay we would have the right to reoccupy the territory relinquished.

"The President of the Republic then invited me to make known my opinion. I must not forget, he said, that the Council of Ministers as yet knew nothing of the matter. When I had finished, the ministers might ask me questions.

"Then I began. I said that it was impossible for me to go into the prospective treaty, since I had been re-

MARSHAL FOCH

fused information on the point. But I would define the military conditions I had always regarded as essential to any such treaty. I read my note of January 10, of which a copy was given to each minister. In the meantime, I stressed the importance always attached by Moltke to the Rhine question. I summarized his principles thus: ‘The bone of contention between Paris and Berlin is the Rhine; whichever holds the river is certain of dominating the other.’

“I then read my note of March 31, in which I criticized certain clauses of the future treaty. The note had elicited no reply from the heads of the Allied Governments. ‘They were within their rights,’ I said. ‘The Allied Governments may, if they wish, leave the question alone; the French Government cannot but take an interest in it.’ I added these exceedingly grave words: ‘To keep the 1914 frontier open to a menace aggravated by the destruction of Russia, and to expose France once more to the devastation she has suffered during the last five years, would be a crime against our country. There is only one remedy: the occupation of the Rhine.’

“The President of the Republic interposed to ask whether, if we entered into a defensive alliance with England and America, we would gain any additional protection as well as that afforded us by the Rhine.

“I answered that I knew nothing of the terms of the

BEFORE THE COUNCIL

alliance, but that even if they were perfect, a year must pass before England could send an army to France. I recalled Lord Kitchener's assertion when he was asked for men on November 1, when the battle of Ypres was being fought. 'In August, 1915, we shall have 800,000 English soldiers in France. Until then, do not rely on anything.' The situation of the British Army is constant; England has no standing army, but she has an immense colonial empire to maintain, and she sends most of her troops overseas. As for the American Army, it would need at least two years.'

"I was emphatic on the point. I stressed the fact that alliances can give no satisfactory guarantees of safety.

"The President of the Republic asked me if the neutralization of the left bank would compensate for the occupation of the river.

"Such a guarantee of safety is worthless, as I showed in my note of March 31,' I answered, and added, 'When I appeal to Allied Governments, I can understand that they should think most of their own interests. They help French interests only in so far as they do not conflict with their own. But the Council of the Ministers of France must consider the interests of France. Our armies at present hold the barrier indispensable to our safety. To abandon it would be a

MARSHAL FOCH

crime against France. The Council of Ministers may care to take upon themselves the responsibility. But in my capacity of Supreme Commander, I hereby clearly state my opinion: that we must in no event abandon the Rhine.'

"One of the Ministers, M. Loucheur, asked me to define the occupation of the Rhine.

"'What is the gist of the matter?' I asked, faithful to my favourite question. 'Defensive measures? For that we would have to hold the bridge-heads. Pledges for payment of the German debt? For that we should have to maintain the occupation all the necessary time, and, in fact, until Germany should be in a position to reassure us as to her intentions.

"The double object can be attained with a small force. The two frontiers, the Rhine frontier I claim, and the one that M. Clemenceau is prepared to give Belgium, Luxembourg and France, are roughly the same in extent; but the first is a formidable barrier, while the second has no natural line of demarcation. It is obvious, therefore, that far fewer troops are needed to hold the former. The Rhine could be firmly held by ten Allied Divisions at first, which might be reduced later. In 1914, France alone put into her frontier lines 244,000 men as a covering army, which failed to provide adequate protection. The Rhine line may be held with about half that number, which further-

BEFORE THE COUNCIL

more would be recruited from among the Allies. France would provide only her portion of them.'

"Another minister then asked me if I had discussed the question with the Allied commanders.

"I answered that the Americans, so far as I knew, intended to withdraw their troops. The English could maintain ten divisions until 1920.

"Someone asked me whether the disarmament of Germany, that the Allies undertook to enforce, would not prevent her from marching to the neutral Rhine and seizing its bridges.

"I replied that the Allied control over German disarmament, so far from being stable, was of an essentially transient nature; it therefore could not provide us with adequate, lasting guarantees of security.

"I was asked what course, in my opinion, France should take if she had to choose between an alliance and the occupation of the Rhine. That, I replied, was a question of higher politics. The Allies could not regard us as hostile because we insisted upon solid, durable guarantees. They would act in accordance with their own interests. They would support us if their interests demanded it, with an alliance or without, as the English did in 1914. Alliances could not but be relative in their value.

"In any case, how can one set prospective alliances against the solid reality of the guard on the Rhine?

MARSHAL FOCH

What are those alliances? What do they state? Who will sign them? Who can guarantee ratification by the different Parliaments? I perceive very clearly what we are abandoning. That is the only definite factor. But our gains in the deal are nebulous in the extreme.'

"Supposing that we agree to the alliances," said one of the ministers, "England and America may offer guarantees. What guarantees could we request, if we abandon the Rhine?"

"None," I said, bluntly. "England's defence, as well as France's, lies on the Rhine."

"Someone asked me exactly what I meant by the expression: 'Hold the Rhine until fresh orders are given.' What was the underlying idea?"

"The point of that is, to guarantee a payment the terms of which I do not know."

"Let us suppose it is a matter of thirty, forty, or fifty years," continued the same minister.

"To which I answered: 'We are not working for all eternity. My idea is to continue the occupation until payments have been made and until Germany is in a state from which we may augur complete security.'

"Then a minister ingenuously asked: 'Supposing that, with the help of the United States, Germany could pay three hundred milliard marks in one year,

BEFORE THE COUNCIL

what would become of the occupation?' (Three hundred milliards!)

"Reasonably enough, I cast doubt upon the realization of such an hypothesis. 'To reconstitute the devastated regions,' I said, 'the inhabitants must feel that they are protected. They have a hard task before them that will last ten or twenty years, and must be reliably secured against more invasion. Without adequate security, how can they enter enthusiastically on their work?'

"But if we succeed in depriving Germany of all her military depôts, railways, docks, etc., on the left bank of the Rhine, would she not be adequately prevented from invading us?" asked another minister.

"I answered that depôts, etc., are not irreplaceable, and that the neutralization of the left bank would not suffice to deprive the enemy of all possibilities of attack.

"In conclusion, I once more drew the attention of the Council to the arguments I had just developed: the inadequacy of alliances to secure the guarantees France may, and should, exact from Allies and enemies alike; the necessity of an occupation of the Rhine; the continual threat of great danger to France in the absence of an occupation, the menace to her existence, would constitute a crime against our country. I declared that for my part I would never concur in the prospective treaty.

MARSHAL FOCH

"With those emotional words I ended the pleading of my cause. The President of Council then invited all who were not ministers to withdraw.

"And that was the dramatic session at which I made my last attempt to convince the members of the Government and prevent them from ratifying the proposal made by the President of Council. I had not much hope of success when I set out. When answering the questions put to me I was as clear and definite as possible. Some of the questions, notably the one dealing with the payment of three hundred milliards in a year, betrayed considerable naïveté."

"I hope, sir, that so ridiculous a question was not asked by the Minister of Finance?" I said.

Foch smiled.

"That does not matter very much," he said. "I cannot tell you exactly what took place afterwards, since I was not there. But you know the outlines. M. Clemenceau spoke in vehement justification of his plan. The President of the Republic then requested each minister to state his opinion. They unanimously decided in favour of M. Clemenceau's project.

"Although the President of the Republic was in his innermost thoughts completely in agreement with me, he was bound by constitutional obligations; as he had no effective power by reason of his lack of responsibility, he judged that he had not the right to state his

BEFORE THE COUNCIL

opinion—which, in any case, would have been to no purpose.

“Nothing could show more clearly that the President of the Republic, despite his pomp and dignities, lacks all real power. The Constitution decrees that he must sign treaties, but it is the head of the Government who prepares them and draws them up. Like President Soliveau, the President of the Republic can know nothing, do nothing, and have no wish to take an active part—surely not an ideal position for the head of a state.

“On the evening of the day when I gave my warning to the Council of Ministers, I sent to the President of Council a copy of the notes taken at my request by General Weygand.

“On the following day, M. Clemenceau returned them, accompanied by a letter in which he said he had refrained from reading them, so that if his memory and mine were in agreement he would not have to authenticate the notes, and if such was not the case he would not be obliged to disown them. We might, he said, be led into futile controversy. Everyone present was free to take notes, but there was no official account of proceedings and no one was charged to inaugurate it.

“When I received the letter, I wrote in the margin: ‘Returned after twenty-four hours uncorrected, therefore uncontested.’

MARSHAL FOCH

“All that was a mere matter of form. The notes were taken at the time in the very room. There could be no doubt of their truth, since General Weygand had made them—and you know his precise, meticulous mind. No one thought of questioning them, and with good reason.”

“M. Jules Cambon was also present at that meeting, sir, but as a mere, and forcedly silent, spectator—a strange position for a man to be in. On the following day he wrote, as you know, a letter embodying the opinion he would have expressed had anyone condescended to invite it.

“He developed the thesis that the treaties of 1815 had unjustifiably placed Prussia on the left bank of the Rhine, thus constituting her our most menacing neighbour. He believed that by freeing our frontier from contact with Prussia, Germany’s aggressive tendencies, and hence the risk of war, would sensibly diminish. In fact, for the most part he adhered to your theory. Coming from a keen observer with a deep knowledge of Germany, from a man known for his moderation, caution and seriousness, such corroboration was obviously of great worth.”

“I think so, too,” said Foch. “Unhappily, he was not allowed to open his mouth.”

XXX

FOCH AT THE PLENARY MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE

THE first batch of German delegates arrived at Versailles on April 28. The rest of the delegation was to follow. The prospective treaty on which the Allies were then trying to agree was, therefore, to be submitted to them. Nobody had troubled to keep me correctly and officially informed. I had only dribbles of information, even on the military matters, which were my especial concern.

"Really, when you come to think of it, the situation was strange, unparalleled. I had failed in my exhortation to the Council of Ministers, and I was now determined to make a supreme effort before the plenary meeting of the Conference. France, after all, did not stand alone. The Allied Governments had entrusted me with their armies, which I had led to victory; it was my right and my duty to give them one last warning, to tell them with no uncertain voice that the treaty which they had outlined with such difficulty was worthless. But to give more precision and more force to my criticism, I needed to see the treaty. I had not

MARSHAL FOCH

yet seen it. On May 5, I wrote an urgent request to M. Clemenceau for information. I took care to send the same letter to President Wilson and Lloyd George. ‘It is indispensable that the Peace Treaty be examined in its entirety, with special reference to those military clauses which have been subjected to several alterations.’ I then asked for the outlines of the treaty, based as it was, on the victory of the Allied Armies they had been pleased to entrust to me.

“On the following day, M. Clemenceau answered me. He, in agreement with President Wilson and Lloyd George, granted my request. One of the first copies of the treaty printed would be sent to me.

“M. Clemenceau allowed himself in conclusion to draw my attention to the fact that I could not, without a grave breach of duty, communicate to anyone whatsoever the whole or any portion whatsoever of the treaty.

“I asked to be heard by a plenary meeting of the Conference. This meeting took place at the Foreign Office on May 6 at three o’clock of the afternoon.

“All the representatives of the Allied countries were there. I appeared before the victors as their chosen Commander-in-Chief, who had done more than anyone else to bring about success. I renewed my criticisms and warning in the most vehement terms. I tried to be brief, arresting, telling. I did not set forth my

MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE

arguments; I smashed them out as I would have used my fists in a fight.

"In order to discuss and criticize the treaty, I said I needed a copy of it. Unfortunately, I did not possess one. But I knew that it provided for a fifteen-year occupation of the Rhineland with retreats every five years. Such a guarantee, I said without mincing my words, was 'from the military point of view, null; it will merely be an increase of work for the Allied occupation.'

"I went on to say that whereas the treaty was non-existent as promoter of our security, it was distinctly bad for reparations. I dealt with that briefly. I asked who would be judge of the situation if we sought to reoccupy the Rhineland because of an infringement of terms by Germany. The Commission for Reparations would not suffice, I said.

"It cannot be denied that I was right on this point, as on many others. I reverted to the military matters in which I was particularly interested, and easily proved that a bad frontier needed many more troops and therefore cost far more money than a good one.

"If I had been asked for an opinion, I would have said: 'The Rhineland question is controlled by the Rhine. The river is the deciding factor. The master of the Rhine is the master of the surrounding country. Whichever side does not control the Rhine has lost. I

MARSHAL FOCH

need not go far afield for a comparison. If we in this room had to defend ourselves, we should only have to hold the doors and the enemy could not enter. But if we lost our position at the doors, he could be among us. In the same way, so long as we hold the Rhine barrier, we are absolute masters of the left bank at very little cost. If we relinquish the Rhine, on the other hand, we shall need many troops to defend a region where we cannot but be weak, since the enemy can swoop upon us whenever he wishes.

“From the military point of view, then, the Rhine alone is of importance. The rest does not count. The occupation of the Rhineland is valuable only because it gives a hold on the Rhine. By retreating, as suggested, we would give up our securities, throw open the doors and put ourselves in the weaker position; for we should be forced to station many troops in a flat country, which would be a far more costly business.

“The occupation of the Rhine is the most economical and reliable plan. I may be mistaken; that is why I ask for other military experts to join me in examining the question. We should hold the Rhine for as long as we need pledges, since there are no others. When we are paid or have sufficient securities, we can withdraw our troops and depart.

“Note particularly that I ask for an occupation of the Rhine, not the Rhineland. On that point our opin-

MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE

ions differ. It has been said that I want to occupy territory; the objection is inaccurate; I merely want the Rhine bridge-heads, which would need very few troops.

“When the treaty is well on the way to fulfilment, when Germany shows undeniable good-will and disarmament has been effected, the load of the Allies and the Germans may be lightened by reducing the occupation; such a reduction will take the form of a smaller occupying force, not the occupation of less territory.

“Summarizing the military view, I say that we must remain unconditionally on the Rhine; we must refuse even a partial cession of the line under pain of incurring a loss of strength and additional burdens, and finding ourselves shortly devoid of all securities. This applies to the whole Rhine line, from Cologne to Coblenz and Mainz.

“Those are the principal points to which I wish to draw your attention. I ask you to consider them and acknowledge my objections, for I cannot let the treaty be signed without protest. I have not seen the text of the treaty; I may be in error; but again I ask that if the treaty does indeed contain those clauses it shall be examined by military experts in order that the extent of possible modifications may be determined.”

“I could not possibly have been clearer or more vigorous or have tried harder to sway them. Unhappily, I swayed no one; the game was lost before ever it

MARSHAL FOCH

began; every mind was decided in advance. I never had many illusions about the probable results. I had not yet seen the treaty which was soon to be solemnly laid before the Germans, but I was determined to express my formal disapproval of its principles. I made that last attempt from a sense of duty, and because I wished to show generations to come that I had no part in such a treaty."

XXXI

FOCH REFUSES TO SEND A TELEGRAM

WHEN I requested a hearing by the Council of Ministers, M. Clemenceau replied that my request would ultimately be granted, before anything had been settled.

"On April 17, M. Clemenceau, in his capacity of President of Council, informed me that the German delegates were going to be officially invited to Versailles for the 25th in order to receive the terms of peace preliminaries. He instructed me to enter into relations with the German Government by means of General Nudant, our representative at Spa, and settle all questions pertaining to the journey of the delegates.

"I at once replied to M. Clemenceau's letter. 'The summons to the German delegates,' I wrote, 'is in direct contradiction with your promise to grant me a hearing by the Council of Ministers before any definite engagements are entered upon.'

"M. Clemenceau's communication also seemed to me obscure and hence impossible to carry out as it stood. It made no mention of the number or rank of the delegates. So short a time was allowed me that I

MARSHAL FOCH

feared I would be unable to elucidate matters. for those reasons I refused to send, in my name, a telegram to General Nudant. If M. Clemenceau particularly wishes the telegram to go, I said, he has only to send it himself direct in his capacity of Minister of War.

"I have never given an order which did not appear to me absolutely clear and accurate. As regards the other aspect of the matter, I had been formally promised a hearing before irremediable measures had been taken. But as the German delegates were being summoned, it was obvious that matters had been settled or were on the point of settlement. There would be no sense otherwise in sending for them. It was highly improbable that the heads of the Allied Governments would call the German representatives to Versailles before coming to agreement between themselves especially on so important a subject as the western frontier of Germany. The Conference had lost far too much time at the beginning and now was precipitating matters towards the climax. The German delegates were already summoned; yet neither President Wilson nor Lloyd George had agreed to the abbreviated demands of France. (They consented on April 20 and April 22 respectively.) Obviously, the Conference wanted to end matters; such haste, however, was to be deprecated.

"On the day after my refusal to send a telegram

A TELEGRAM

which I could not understand—and which violated a solemn promise—Clemenceau reproached me vehemently.

“‘I shall always act in that way,’ I told him, very calmly. ‘I shall never give my subordinates an order that I cannot understand myself.’

“Clemenceau became angry.

“‘Things cannot go on like this,’ he said.

“‘You can do whatever you like,’ I answered.

“It has been said that I granted an interview to the *Matin*, that one of my officers read the proofs, and that President Wilson and Lloyd George complained bitterly to Clemenceau. It appears then that Clemenceau defended me and that I acknowledged to him that I had been in the wrong, saying: ‘Very well, I will abate my demands.’

“It is untrue.

“I had merely been interviewed by the *Daily Mail* on my opinion of the treaty in preparation. The censor, however, refused to pass it. Clemenceau was domineering and a Jacobin, and was unwilling for anyone, particularly a soldier, to participate in the negotiations he was conducting. He wanted to conduct them alone.”

“How do you account for that attitude, sir?” I asked him. “For after the battle of Chemin-des-Dames, he was magnificent in his sturdy defence of you when you

MARSHAL FOCH

were attacked by certain politicians. They seemed to forget that a battle lasting several months must include losses as well as gains."

"I cannot account for it," replied Foch. "After our victory of July 19, 1918, he learned that I was preparing another big offensive for August 8. I had not told him; I had not told anyone, for fear of leakages.

"So you are still attacking?" he said, disagreeably. "With what? You have troops, then?"

"You need not worry," I told him. "I have all I need. I can even say that things are not going too badly."

"Given my attitude and my definite disapproval of the treaty, how could I attend the Conference when the treaty was to be formally submitted to the Germans?

"When I returned from the Conference meeting, I seriously considered missing the Versailles session. That would have emphasized my disapproval still more strongly. I had not been consulted nor heeded as regards one of the essential clauses, therefore there was no necessity for my presence when the treaty was presented to the Germans. I reflected deeply on all the details. I consulted Weygand and Destiker. Finally, after examining every aspect of the question with them, it seemed to me that when the Allies were all united before the enemy's representatives, the Commander-in-

A TELEGRAM

Chief of their armies could not be absent. That was the reason that influenced me. A soldier's scruple.

"M. Clemenceau, fearing the very bad impression my absence would make, sent M. Jean Dupuy to find out my intentions. I was careful not to let him discover them.

"The following morning, some 'observers' were paying the greatest attention to my movements, to know whether or not I was going to Versailles. They are always so easy to detect. They had been sent by Mandel, who, as you know, loves that kind of police work.

"The harm was done now. It was irreparable.

"At about this time, I was present at a meeting with a certain number of the members of the Government. As we were leaving, I bluntly remarked to M. Klotz, the Finance Minister: 'With the treaty you have just signed, sir, you can expect with certainty to be paid in monkey tricks.'

"Klotz was surprised and extremely annoyed, and snapped: 'Sir, I am not in the habit of accepting such currency!'

"To which I replied: 'Sir, you will have to adapt yourself to that habit.'

"Thereupon I left him."

XXXII

LESSONS TAUGHT BY HISTORY

ONE of Foch's dominant traits is the perfect balance of his character, which saves him from discouragement, still more from depression. Events may prove contrary to his hopes, but they can never exhaust his energy and confidence.

The plan he had put forward for adoption, the only plan, in his opinion, that guaranteed our safety, had been rejected. In its place had been concocted a scheme full of uncertainty and disadvantages, flimsy and built on sand, as events soon showed.

At the famous session of the Council of Ministers of April 25, Foch had unsuccessfully pleaded with the members of the Government. He admonished them not to commit the folly of exchanging the reality of the Rhine frontier for the unsubstantiality of a Franco-American alliance.

“Where are those unrealized alliances?” he cried out to them. “What do they lay down? Who guarantees their ratification by the various Governments?”

He had no need to emphasize the extraordinary correctness of his prophecies. They were soon proved true.

LESSONS TAUGHT BY HISTORY

The pact was not ratified by the United States, which allowed England to refuse ratification in her turn. She had, with a caution amounting to cunning, withdrawn from the game beforehand. Nothing was left of their promises, with which we had unwisely contented ourselves. Only our cessions remained.

One day during the spring of 1923, the Marshal spoke about it once more.

"I have been astonished to discover, while reading history, how far from new was the problem of security we had to face in 1919, at the end of the War. Of course, there are very few completely novel problems in history. Other countries, in other ages, had been confronted by the same problem. Curiously enough, we were then their adversaries. The situation, as often happens in the course of the centuries, was reversed. The French had not to beware of Germany; on the contrary, Germany and Holland sought urgent, solid protection against us.

"How did they visualize that protection? Did they have recourse to the alliances and diplomatic pacts offered them, the kind of pacts we were offered by our Allies at the end of the last War?

"Not a bit of it. The Dutch, Germans and Austrians have always looked upon such pacts as worthless scraps of paper. The security offered them thereby they esti-

MARSHAL FOCH

mated at zero. That is exactly what I said a century or two later, to anyone willing to listen—or rather, to those extremely reluctant to listen.

“The Dutch, for example, felt themselves menaced by the ambition of France. They were separated from her by the Netherlands (first under Spanish ownership then under Austrian); but they refused, as guarantees of security, anything but a good frontier, a line of fortresses solidly connected and well garrisoned. Alternatives they ignored. Concentrating on their chief anxiety, by dint of determination they obliged their ally, England, to accept their barrier system—a very curious one—and proceeded to give it substantial and legal form.

“You remember the arrangement and its details? I examined it closely the other day in my books. It is extremely interesting.

“The distrustful and far-seeing Dutch wanted to keep the French at a distance; so they occupied and garrisoned a certain number of fortresses in Flanders, which was not their property but belonged first to Spain, then to Austria. They met with opposition from their allies the English, who did not greatly care for the scheme; the legal owners of Flanders, the Spanish and later the Austrians not to mention the principal persons concerned, the Flemish—liked

LESSONS TAUGHT BY HISTORY

it still less. But the Dutch carried out their scheme.

"They were a provident people who deemed that it was impossible to be too cautious. Although the victory over their enemies was not crushing, they succeeded in obtaining from it the maximum benefit. Above all, they refused empty words and were not content with unrealities. They insisted on substantialities and good garrisons.

"The barrier system was in force for nearly three-quarters of a century, from 1715 to 1781. It fulfilled its object to perfection. For a long time there was no war in the Low Countries. It may seem to infringe certain rights of sovereignty, those of Spain, for example; and it was exceedingly unwelcome to the inhabitants themselves. But the primitive necessity of securing peace caused it to be adopted.

"That is what history shows us if we take the trouble to look.

"In the eighteenth century, such a system was legally admissible. With slight modifications, it was imposed on France in 1814 and 1815 by the victorious allies. What was the object of the allies of that period, Austrians, Prussians, English and Russians? Exactly the same as that of the principal allies of 1919, English, Americans and French: to prevent a country from waging war. In 1815 that country was France; in 1919,

MARSHAL FOCH

Germany. In 1815, were they content to sign pacts of alliance among themselves and promise mutual support in case of aggression from the enemy? Most certainly, they were not.

“Diplomatic means they regarded as empty and meaningless. They wanted realities, not will-o’-the-wisps. England demanded and obtained a buffer state on our northern frontier. The means by which she arranged for its creation were questionable in the extreme. The Belgian provinces were arbitrarily and artificially attached to Holland; fifteen years later they detached themselves and declared their independence. But if the means were dubious, the principle was excellent. Belgium was now an independent country and henceforth was to live and prosper in her independence. When she was attacked, Germany, not France, was the aggressor. If we had shown in 1919 the same unshakable obstinacy that England displayed in 1815, we could, and should, have obtained an independent Rhineland state. It would have evolved freely between France and Germany, as Belgium had done. The process would have been as natural and practicable as the Belgian process a century earlier.

“Prussia and Austria, England’s allies in 1815, took the most stringent precautions on the Rhine. They organized against us, with all desirable solidity, the Rhine barrier that we should have erected against

LESSONS TAUGHT BY HISTORY

Germany in 1919. Prussia, besides holding the Rhine line, extended beyond it and grasped a part of the Rhineland on the left bank of the river. The two fortresses commanding the river, Coblenz and Mainz, were occupied by Prussia and Austria, respectively. Such a line, although strong, was not considered sufficient. The French had to be kept as far distant as possible. The Austrians and Prussians decided to hold as long-range protection the fortified towns of Landau and Luxembourg.

“Those occupations, you observe, were an infringement of the rights of the legal owners. Mainz belonged to the Grand Duke of Hesse, and Holland owned Luxembourg. That counted for nothing. The primordial need of security from war overbore sovereign rights and eclipsed them. As they said in those days: ‘The expedients of Europe and the Right are one.’ Yet that arrangement, too, lasted a long time. For fifty years it maintained peace on that frontier. Although it was overtly directed against France, she did not protest. She bore with it. She accepted it precisely as Germany would have accepted a similar arrangement in 1919.

“Statesmen, politicians and soldiers can all glean useful information from history.”

Thereupon Foch filled his pipe and settled squarely in his armchair.

MARSHAL FOCH

"Let us try to throw a little light on it all. What exactly was the position? Our Allies said to us when the Peace Treaty was mooted: 'In exchange for the Rhine as a military frontier, for which you are asking, we will first of all disarm and neutralize in the military sense the left bank of the river. We will also treat the right bank similarly for a distance of fifty kilometres from the river.'

"I replied: 'As a guarantee that is worthless. The Rhine bridges are essential to us. Whoever holds them is master of the situation. Whereas Prussia would be only fifty kilometres distant from the river, we should be one hundred and fifty kilometres away when the Rhineland is evacuated. Obviously, then, Prussia could race us to the Rhine. She would seize the bridges. That is why I demanded a military guard on the Rhine.'

"Then our Allies proposed the disarmament of Germany. It cannot be too often asserted that such a step would give us a mere temporary, precarious, illusory security. It is practically impossible to prevent Germany from arming herself in secret. Since the Ruhr affair, for example, the inter-Allied Commission is no longer in a position to control her."

The Marshal grew more and more animated. He left his chair and walked a few steps towards me.

LESSONS TAUGHT BY HISTORY

"Look here," he said, "it's all so obvious that you only need a grain of common sense to be convinced of it. Suppose I wanted to ruin you entirely, Recouly. If I merely took your pocket-book, I would not be showing signs of great intelligence. You would still have your bank-balance and the contents of your safe. You would still have also your head and your pen, with which I am sure you would earn your living very successfully. If I took your pen you would merely resort to a quill.

"That was Germany's case. If she wants to make war, there is nothing to prevent her from finding the means, and no proof that those means will fail her. In other words, weakness, real or feigned, on the part of your adversary does not give you actual strength.

"You must be a madman to believe that it does. You must be strong with your own strength and the solidity of your position, not with the alleged feebleness of your enemy.

"Well, as a third security, we were offered a pact of alliance. You and I both know what happened to it. When I first heard of it I said: 'It's all monkey tricks.' Events have not proved me wrong.

"So we were in an extremely critical situation. The solution of the problem had not advanced one stage. Certain of our Allies had promised us a pact as guaran-

MARSHAL FOCH

tee; since they had broken their word, they were morally obliged to acknowledge that we were entitled to compensation, and that we had a right to seek and find another plan."

PART III
MISCELLANEOUS AND PERSONAL

XXXIII

FOCH ON RUSSIA

IN October, 1916, I was appointed by the French G.H.Q. as Liaison Officer attached to the Russian Army. I knew that Army already, having spent a year with it in Manchuria, as war-correspondent, during the Russo-Japanese campaign of 1904 and 1905.

Foch took an interest in my mission, and asked me to see him before I left, at his H.Q. in Villers-Bretonneux, near Amiens. It was towards the end of the battle of the Somme, which had been planned and superintended by him.

The General was living on the fine estate of M. Delacour, a man of great charm and an ornithologist of high standing. According to the English, who hold that science in great esteem, he was one of the five or six men in the world with a thorough knowledge of birds.

My friend James Hyde accompanied me. We both lunched with Foch and his Staff Officers, who were, as always, few in number. Among them I found most of my comrades during the battles of the Marne and the Yser. Foch's visitors always saw the same faces.

MARSHAL FOCH

He chose his colleagues with great care, and when they had won his confidence he kept them constantly with him.

After luncheon, Foch took me into his room, which was small, comfortless and filled with the heat of a coal stove.

Foch gave me a letter of hearty recommendation to General Janin, the head of our military mission to the Russian G.H.Q. He then waxed warm in praise of him. He spoke highly of his clear-sightedness and good sense. ‘No one knows the Russians better,’ he told me. ‘Always consult him before doing anything; you will not regret it.’

Then, seizing the essential idea straightway, he began speaking of Russia in his abrupt, colourful phrases.

“I was there a few years before the War, to see some manœuvres.

“I tried to observe the Army keenly. It has its good, bad and indifferent elements. It does not lack men. But in a war that kills off so many officers, how can Russia replace them?

“In warfare, or even in life, nations, like individuals, do not what they want but what they can. Their actions are usually determined by the physical, geographical, historical and ethnographical conditions governing their lives. The conditions in Russia are

FOCH ON RUSSIA

as different as they can be from those in France. War in Russia must necessarily be very different, too."

He left his chair, and took me by the arm to a map of Europe that covered part of the wall. On one side of it there was a large-scale map of the French Front, on the other a small-scale map of foreign Fronts.

"The first thing to consider is distance. Look at this map. There you have the various groups of Russian Armies. Between Petrograd and the southwestern group near the Carpathians, there is about the same distance as between the Carpathians and Paris. Think about that for a minute, and certain obscure things will be clear in your mind. Our own efforts are concentrated, as it might be in a pocket-handkerchief. Their efforts are scattered. How can you expect war to be the same on their Front as on ours? Distance explains everything: bad roads or no roads, inadequate railways, difficulty in getting supplies of food, munitions, etc. You can deduce all the consequences."

After giving me some general advice on my mission, he said: "Above all, go and see Janin. Joffre and I have every confidence in him.

"When allied armies fight together in the same cause, the commander of one of them is instinctively inclined to believe that the others are not doing all they ought and all they can. He does not take into sufficient account the various obstacles that may be hinder-

MARSHAL FOCH

ing them. The Russians' methods of fighting, their will-power and morale throughout so lengthy a war, are necessarily different from those of England and France.

"I have travelled in Russia only to a very small extent, but I have a very fair knowledge of her history. There are a certain number of inevitable consequences that any intelligent man can deduce from her geographical, economic and political conditions. The country has not the same formation, the same framework as ourselves. She has almost no middle classes.

"Given the hosts of officers who were killed during the first two years of the War, you may be sure that the problem of replacing them—which we settled quite satisfactorily—cannot be so easily solved by the Russians. They cannot find substitutes as we did. They certainly have an abundance of troops, which we have not. But what are men without officers? Their bands of rough, badly trained peasants are soldiers only in name. Also, their industries are in a primitive state. How can they tide over the crisis caused by lack of guns and munitions, when with all our resources and facilities of maritime communication we ourselves are so hard pressed to weather it?

"You must think of all that when you see their Army. You must take all those factors into account, or else you may form false opinions and judgments.

FOCH ON RUSSIA

"Try to keep your eyes open, verify whatever you hear and believe nothing until it is proved. Russia once had a Potemkin; she is sure to have his disciples and successors now."

The sage counsel of Foch often returned to my mind during the winter and the spring and summer of 1917. I was then visiting the various parts of the immense Russian Front, darting from Riga to Rumania and from Rumania to the Caucasus.

I found the country in a more advanced stage of disorganization and chaos than Foch, with all his wisdom and good sense, had felt from a distance. I arrived in Petrograd only a few days before the assassination of Rasputin; the curtain had risen on the first act of the Revolution. I was in Rumania, at Jassy, and was lunching at the house of our Minister, M. de Sainte-Aulaire; General Berthelot and Robert de Flers were present. During the meal came the first telegrams announcing the fall of Tsarism.

Besides being a great general, Foch was a historian and philosopher. He gave much time to reflection on history and the evolution of countries. He believed that geography, and the general physical conditions of a country, determine almost automatically its history. The temperament and psychology of a people can be largely explained by a certain number of vital facts that one must know. When one has elucidated them,

MARSHAL FOCH

all becomes relatively clear. Statesmen, diplomatists, and great generals alike should take those factors into consideration when dealing with foreign countries.

My next visit to Foch was on my return from Russia in September, 1917, a few weeks before the Bolshevik *coup d'état*. He was then Chief of Staff at Paris.

He received me in his office at the Invalides and rained concise questions on me.

"What is the physical and moral state of the country? Has she still the will and the means to fight?"

"It is rather too much, sir, to expect a country to wage war and revolution simultaneously. She must choose; and, unhappily for us, Russia has chosen. She definitely prefers revolution. She is no longer interested in war."

"I was afraid so," answered Foch. "And what about Kerensky?"

"I can tell you what my old friend Goutchkof said of him a fortnight ago in Petrograd. He was dismissed from the Ministry of War by Kerensky. He is a great patriot and an honest man in the full sense of the term. 'Kerensky,' he said, 'is only an hysterical play-actor. He imagines he has settled everything when he has come to the end of a long speech. Heaven alone knows if he ever leaves off speechifying at any hour of

FOCH ON RUSSIA

the day or night. Whatever his audience, military or civil, on he goes!" "

"How can a man like Albert Thomas take such a puppet seriously?"

"They are both socialists, sir. They both believe firmly in Revolution with a big R. As a socialist, Kerensky can never offer serious, effective resistance to the Bolsheviks. He has no enemies on the left. He will recall generals and destroy what discipline remains, but he will never raise a finger against Lenin."

"What has happened to the Army or its remains? What about discipline and the relations between officers and men? How are the railways working? That is the best measure of a country's disorganization."

I answered his questions to the best of my ability. I was careful to quote concrete, significant examples in my replies. I dwelt upon the rapidly increasing growth of disorganization over the whole of that huge country. Week by week, almost day by day, it spread, sapping and destroying her military, political and social being. Russia was deteriorating, with horrifying speed, towards anarchy and chaos.

I told Foch that the railways in particular had proved susceptible to disorganization. During the five weeks of my journey to the Caucasus, from April to the end of May, disorder had considerably increased.

MARSHAL FOCH

After listening with close attention, he asked me a blunt final question.

"In short, you believe that Russia as well as her Army is finished?"

"Precisely so, sir," I told him; "The Germans need not leave many divisions on that Front."

"Well, I suppose they will bring them all over to us, fifty divisions at the very least. It's a lot. And it is not cheering. But we have been through equally bad times, if not worse. We shall try to worry through once more."

I have never been more deeply impressed than by Foch's imperturbable confidence and his strength in face of the gathering storm. When I went in I was dejected. I left feeling full of confidence.

XXXIV

FOCH ON GAMBETTA

IN connection with my history of the Third Republic, Foch spoke of Gambetta and the part he played in the Government of National Defence.

“From the military point of view,” he said, “Gambetta has been severely, and unjustly, criticized.

“As regards the best way of conducting a possible continuation of the war, Gambetta was right and Thiers wrong.

“Although Thiers prided himself on being a great strategist, he had many false beliefs in military matters. For instance, he thought that it takes at least seven years to make a good soldier—which is absurd. He was also convinced after Sedan that any serious resistance to invading armies was impossible. That is not true.

“France could have resisted with the greatest of ease. She might even have been victorious. Of course, she needed intelligent, judicious methods; whereas in reality some grave mistakes were made, first and foremost that of confining the Government within Paris.

MARSHAL FOCH

As soon as Paris was made the centre of resistance, all was lost.

“The first precaution to be taken with a new army is to allow it time to form itself. Until it is in a state of organization, it should not be made to take the offensive, which is very difficult for raw recruits. In fact, it is almost impossible. Now, directly we allowed ourselves to be blockaded inside Paris, we were forced to an offensive. It was incumbent upon the garrison of the city to attempt sorties, therefore our Loire Army was obliged to attack in order to help the besieged.

“If, on the contrary, we had limited ourselves to a defensive rôle and fought the territory inch by inch, the enemy would at the same time have been obliged to increase his line; he might even have been forced to descend below the Loire down to the Plateau Central. In the meantime, we could have organized and trained our troops. Then we could have seized the first favourable opportunity to attack and check the Germans. Bismarck was in mortal terror of a prolonged war. Rather than risk it, he would have come to terms.

“Gambetta saw all that quite clearly. His intuition amounted to genius. That is why I rate him so highly. Read also what the German general, von der Goltz, says in his book: *Gambetta and the Republican Armies*.

“What he lacked was subordinates and intermedi-

FOCH ON GAMBETTA

aries capable of putting his plans into execution. His generals were for the most part deficient in intelligence and enthusiasm. They were old men brought up in the old school, and were persuaded, as was Thiers, that soldiers and armies were made gradually. As they had no confidence in the instrument placed in their hands, they used it badly.

"I joined up in the mass levy. I was nineteen. The uniform of most of the recruits consisted of a blue blouse, under which they could wear all the clothes they wanted. We had scarcely enlisted before we were sent into training-camps, where we slept under canvas. We had a terrible winter, died like flies. Why were we treated so stupidly? Because the old-timers firmly believed that nothing but the hardest training and privations, and sleeping under canvas, could form soldiers, which is ridiculous. You can gather from that the mentality of the old soldiers whom Gambetta had to handle."

XXXV

FOCH ON REPARATIONS

ALL my efforts had but one aim: to obtain reparations and security for France," said Foch, whenever he mentioned the treaty. "The two are inseparable; they cannot and should not be severed.

"Sometimes I hear well-meaning people say: 'After all, security is more to us than reparations. France is a rich country and has always managed to pull herself through hard times. What we want is the certainty that Germany will be unable to attack us for a long time to come. We will manage the rest all right.'

"In my opinion," said Foch, "such people must hold our credit very high. After all, our recovery depends entirely on our debts being paid.

"In this connection I will tell you one of my most vivid war-memories.

"When I was appointed to the Supreme Command in March, 1918, you know that matters were not too bright.

"We were experiencing the utmost difficulty in stemming the German advance. The English were greatly alarmed. Many times did Lloyd George, Field-Marshal

FOCH ON REPARATIONS

Haig and General Wilson ask me: ‘Supposing that you cannot bear up under the strong German pressure, and are forced to retreat, in what direction will you go? Beyond Paris or towards the Channel ports? Which of them do you prefer to sacrifice?’

“My answer was always the same. ‘I flatly refuse to be hemmed in. I shall defend and save both Paris and the ports.’ For all the persistence of the English, I would not depart from my answer: ‘Both Paris and the ports.’”

“Well, we must now show the same determination. There can be no alternative or choice for us; we must have both reparations and security. Both are vital to us.”

The Marshal put all his heart into his subject. In short vigorous sentences he sketched a France deprived of all reparations.

“We have a million and a half dead, which is a terrible drain on a nation with a poor birth-rate. Our colossal debt is constantly on the increase. Most state resources are devoted to the payment of arrears on that debt. There is scarcely any money for public needs. We are obliged to practise excessive reductions in productive outlay. Our officials, particularly the highest, are so badly paid that the best of them go elsewhere. (M. Poincaré again told me only a few days ago that

MARSHAL FOCH

it is practically impossible to keep officials at the Finance Ministry.) Our industrial and economical outfit is old-fashioned, and will not allow us to compete with the rest of the world. Our railways, canals, docks, telegraph-lines and telephones are badly maintained through lack of money. In short, we shall be a stunted, isolated land, given over to Malthusianism, and forced to abstain from all self-development.

“And that,” Foch cried, “is the France you will have in a few years’ time if she is to shoulder all the burden of reparations. Without the greatest care, our race will die away.

“So the Germans must pay.

“Up to the present, have we taken all the necessary steps to obtain payment? I fear not. But we can yet recover our position and obtain the payments we so sorely need—if we have the will-power, a plan, methods, and the determination to allow nothing to divert us from our aim. That is the only way to succeed in military or civil matters, war or peace.”

XXXVI

POINCARÉ AND LLOYD GEORGE

January, 1920

I WENT to see Foch, with whom was General Weygand. We spoke of the collapse of the Leygues Government.

“It is much better so,” said the Marshal. “They had no authority. It is much better that they should be replaced by a stronger combination.”

Foch questioned me on the political situation.

“A Poincaré Government is now necessary for much the same reasons as a Clemenceau Government was needed towards the end of the War,” I said.

“I fully agree,” replied Foch, “and I mean to use what small power I have to say as much to the President of the Republic at the first opportunity. Anyhow, I can tell you, if you are interested, what happened on December 31 last, at the Elysée, where I went to give M. Millerand my New Year wishes.

“After a few commonplaces, I said: ‘We are about to begin a critical period, Monsieur le Président. We need as President of Council a leader who knows what

MARSHAL FOCH

he wants and exercises over the ministers, deputies and country the influence you yourself exerted when you filled the post. I know,' I added, 'that in saying such things to you I am outside my province. Forgive me, nevertheless, for taking the liberty.'

"With that I departed, leaving the words uppermost in his mind."

Foch spoke of Lloyd George.

"He changes his mind as easily as he changes his shirt. More often, if anything. Shirts can always be turned inside-out. Yet he remains at the head. Since the end of the War, we have had to deal with him alone, while our Government has seen at least two or three changes. He has a thorough knowledge of the Peace Treaty—which is not surprising considering that he was mainly responsible for it. He still has the same colleagues who helped him in that connection. Whenever a difficulty arises, he calls on the one who knows all the details of the matter in hand and can straightway quote such and such an article. We, on the other hand, have an entirely different set of officials, and, to make matters worse, we are constantly changing them."

XXXVII

FRANCE AND GERMANY AFTER THE WAR: LLOYD GEORGE

May, 1922

FOR several years to come we have nothing to fear from Germany," said Foch. "She is in a physical and moral state that will not allow her to nourish dreams of vengeance for some time. That is the vital point. Our security is assured for years to come. Therefore, we may, and we must, bring all our efforts to bear on reparations, and discover how best we can make her pay. That is another story. We need a definite plan. I cannot see that we have one. We may be obliged to coerce her. We should have to send over bailiffs, or rather, troops."

"Do you contemplate serious difficulties with England, sir, if we have recourse to extremes, such as an occupation of the Ruhr district?"

"I do not think any complications will arise. England will eventually understand the necessity under which we are labouring. She will not be pleased, but nevertheless she will accept it. I am very optimistic as to Franco-British relations. There may be individ-

MARSHAL FOCH

ual acts of foolishness on both sides of the Channel, but the friendship and union of the two countries are too solidly founded to be shaken by them."

Foch had often visited London on official journeys and conferences, where he had been mostly in contact with English generals. On their esteem, deep admiration and veneration he had based his opinion.

He then spoke of Lloyd George.

"I am greatly astonished that England allows him to continue. Throughout the whole world, extraordinary post-War conditions of trouble and confusion are prevalent. Were it otherwise, such a man, devoid of all the qualities most appreciated by the English, would surely not continue to shape the destiny of so great a nation. There are times," he added, "when national and Parliamentary plans are at cross-purposes. It is doubtless for Parliamentary reasons, of which I am a poor judge, that the English are obliged to tolerate Lloyd George as their leader. It is impossible for things to continue much longer as they are. They have lasted quite long enough. If he were given his own way he would drag England straight to Bolshevism. Not only England, but the whole of Europe. To him the vital point is to remain in power. Nothing else is of importance. That is what an English general said to me the other day before leaving for India. He seemed very anxious, and with good reason."

AFTER THE WAR

Then we discussed our Army. He had often spoken about it, for the subject is very near to his heart.

"We lost a great deal of time," he told me. "We were two years without doing anything. At last it was decided to set to work. Logic and common sense pointed out the way. We had to face the problem and ask ourselves: What troops do we need to defend our frontiers? What resources of men and money have we? And now, with the problem set out before us and the means of solving it at our disposal, what is the most intelligent and practical way of using the means to solve the problem?"

July, 1922

I saw Foch on his return from a journey to London.

"I found England in a strange state," he told me. "All those of my friends whom I met were in distress. They believe that through the fault of the Government their country is becoming Bolshevik."

He then gave me a touching account of the funeral of his dear old friend Wilson.

"They had waited for me to come before covering his body. His widow told me that she intimated to the members of the Government, and to Lloyd George in particular, that she would not tolerate their presence in the funeral procession. I did not try to see Lloyd

MARSHAL FOCH

George. He was in the midst of Parliamentary battles and was extremely busy."

We spoke of reparations.

"Our great misfortune," said Foch, "is that we have no plan. If only we had a well-conceived, clear, practical plan, England could not but accept it."

XXXVIII

FOCH AND THE RUHR

January, 1922

I HAD proposed a plan for the occupation we eventually found necessary," said Foch, "but it was carried out differently.

"I wanted to occupy a restricted but adequate zone comprising Essen, so that we could easily and quickly set to work. Here are all the papers pertaining to the matter."

He opened a drawer and showed me his reports complete with maps.

"At first, they wanted to occupy far too large an area, mainly for reasons of prestige, which have nothing to do with practical considerations.

"After occupying the first strip of land we could, if necessary, spread to a second and even a third. We should thus have time to assimilate each area.

"I also wanted to defer the occupation until the Reparations Commission had issued its report, so that our action should be based on Germany's general defal-

MARSHAL FOCH

cation as well as on her infringement of the coal and wood clauses.

"I was found too slow and too timid. The Government wanted to swallow everything at one gulp. Consequently, we choked and could not digest it.

"The Germans, perceiving this, naturally hastened to put difficulties in our way and obstruct us. It took a certain amount of time to clarify matters. We are still doing so.

"Things are going on well. Under French supervision, we shall soon have enough trains to assure transport. The same applies to telegraphic and telephonic lines.

"First point: our transport will be adequate.

"Second point: as work is being continued, we shall soon have the quantity of coal we find necessary. On the other hand, we shall also be in a position to ration Germany in coal and iron. Our position is consolidated, and German protests will be useless.

"What then, will happen? The German Cabinet is putting up a bluff. They are playing their last card. It is a matter of life and death to their industrial magnates. They will fight to the bitter end, but the end is not far distant. When they feel they are beaten, they will ask to parley. Very probably they will pass on the cards to someone else. It is quite in the German

FOCH AND THE RUHR

tradition. Then we may see the arrival of a democrat, Breitcheid, for instance."

"He is an old acquaintance of mine, sir. I saw a lot of him during my last stay in Berlin. He is young and clever, and has specialized in foreign affairs. He is very friendly with Léon Blum, with whom he has some points of likeness."

"If the socialists come into power," resumed the Marshal, "they will try to awaken our compassion. They will plead that Germany cannot possibly pay. Then we must be cautious.

"You must not forget that the occupation of the Ruhr is not an end, but a means. What objective should we then select?

"We must have a practical plan of reparations. The Reparations Commission and our Government should at once draw up their programme.

"The Ruhr only affords us the means of bringing material and moral pressure to bear upon Germany. The means are necessary to force her to carry out her agreements. It then remains with us, and us alone, to formulate our demands.

"I have not much faith in appointing a control over German finances and duties. A country like Germany cannot be treated as though she were Turkey. How could we establish effective control? How could we prevent leakages over their immense frontiers? We

MARSHAL FOCH

must force Germany to pay by means of the Ruhr, but we must leave her to choose the manner of her payment."

A few months later, the Marshal was far less optimistic.

"Since 1919 we have been master of Europe. We can do what we like. But we must know what we want, and on that point we are undecided.

"Take the Ruhr for instance. We have no plans. The ministers go there one after the other: the Minister of War, the Commissioner from the Office of Works, and Heaven knows how many more. What we need is centralized supervision and a governmental scheme.

"Recently, I was called back from my vacation to confer with Tirard on the principle of Rhineland separation. In my opinion, which I stated frankly, we must not regard its independence as an end in itself, but as a means. It ought to be made an important element in our policy—which we should prepare slowly and with great care. If we evolve such a policy, the independence of the Rhineland will automatically follow. Then we would have the reality instead of a word.

"What should that policy be? We should meet qualified representatives of the Rhineland and discuss the means of ameliorating their economic situation, which is their main interest. A terrible crisis is at

FOCH AND THE RUHR

hand throughout the whole of Germany. How can it be avoided in the Rhineland? Hold discussions with her representatives, take their wishes into consideration —in short, establish a species of consultant assembly, a little Rhineland Parliament. We should have the majority of the population with us. But at present they have only professional politicians and agitators, who, being mere adventurers, have not the trust of their compatriots. They have only to show themselves on our side for the rest of the population to turn from us."

A few months later we reverted to the Ruhr question.

"It's extraordinary and unbelievable," said the Marshal, "that we have obtained no practical, lasting results from the occupation."

"How do you account for it?" I asked.

"There are no two explanations possible. There is only one: our absolute inability to act.

"I am constantly saying to our ministers: 'Whether we are dealing with reparations or with security, the plan must come from us. We must not wait for others to discover one for us. It would be madness to entrust such a charge to others. It is obvious that if they did invent a plan it would suit their requirements rather than ours.'

"The fundamentals of the problem have not changed. We must set to work, plan a policy, and carry it out.

MARSHAL FOCH

That is the only way of carrying the English along with us. Instead of that, we spend our time quarrelling about simple matters of procedure. If I had acted in that way, I can assure you that the War would never have been won. Instead of disputing with Haig, I always said: ‘Everything is going on splendidly. This is what we are going to do now. We will get on with it at once.’ And he followed suit. I am continually quoting the case to our Government. They listen to me with great attention and respect, and tell me I am absolutely right. A few days later, they make some fine speeches, and matters remain as they were.

“Take as an example our method of winding up the Ruhr affair. Had our occupation been better conducted and, above all, put to better use, we should have obtained extremely important results financially and economically—perhaps, even, politically.

“Finally, American financiers and experts drew up a system for regulating Germany’s payments.

“Isn’t that a striking proof of my assertion?”

XXXIX

FOCH ON FRENCH POLICY: MILLERAND, POINCARE: *THE FALLOW LAND* AND *THE BELLS*

February, 1924

IT was late afternoon when I saw the Marshal. I found him in a pessimistic mood, which was rare with him.

"The Poincaré ministry is weakened in the House and may be outvoted in the Senate. The elections are fore-shadowed as a time of confusion and trouble. Financial and economical difficulties, the high cost of living and the new taxes with which we are threatened, cannot fail to anger the electorate, who will then play into the hands of the radicals and socialists. The Left Wing parties may well come into power and the future of our finances would thereby be imperilled.

"Do you ever see Alexandre?" asked the Marshal. (Alexandre was M. Millerand.) "He is just as powerless against M. Poincaré as the latter was against M. Clemenceau. What could be more natural? Why should similar causes produce dissimilar effects?"

He dwelt on the financial situation, which was then

MARSHAL FOCH

exceedingly grave. Also on the movement against the franc, which was daily becoming more marked; so far, however, we had not paid sufficient heed to the question.

"It's not very bright," said the Marshal. "You have certainly not brought any sunbeams with you."

I replied that unfortunately none were available.

"Yet," he pursued, "after 1870 France revived very quickly; in fact, with miraculous speed. A few years were all she needed for complete recovery, financial, political, and moral. When I point this out to our Government and compare the case with the stagnation in which we are wallowing, they invariably object that present-day problems are much more complicated and much harder to solve.

"The objection is worthless, absolutely worthless," said Foch, vehemently. "It does not satisfy me; it could not satisfy any man of sense. I will never admit that defeat contributes more to recovery than does victory. An explanation must be sought elsewhere. In my opinion, it can be found only in the worth of the individuals involved in each case. After 1870 we had genuine statesmen, Thiers, Ferry and Gambetta. They had theories of government and politics. Even on military matters, Thiers had definite ideas. He knew what he wanted. He was sometimes wrong, witness his notion that it takes seven years to train a soldier. That

FRENCH POLICY

was obviously erroneous. But at least he had theories and methods of his own, and any ideas are better than none. We have too few statesmen of such scope and value. Most members of our Government can see matters solely from the Parliamentary point of view. Debates in the Chamber or the Senate compose their universe and absorb all their attention and energy. They have none left for the other things with which our world is filled. Their debates are usually mere exercises in oratory."

The subject was a favourite one. The Marshal often dealt with it when I was with him.

"A statesman is like a general; both must have theories, methods and clear-cut opinions as to the main problems they have to solve. They must also have time for reflection and examination, time in which their plans can come to maturity. Our Government lacks both time and theories. Our ministers live in a complete, if ephemeral, whirlwind. How can we wonder that our vital questions remain unanswered?

"Last week, for instance, I saw one of our foremost politicians, who is considered a candidate for the Ministry of Finance.

"‘Our financial affairs have come to a crisis,’ I said to him. ‘To weather it, we need an all-embracing plan. We must face the facts—all of them. We must seek and discover a general remedy instead of the hundred-

MARSHAL FOCH

and-one little isolated measures that we are incessantly taking at present—which are often incoherent and contradictory. Have you considered the matter? If so, have you the time to fulfil your plans? Are you sure of the near future and the days beyond it? For continuity is essential to political efforts if satisfactory results are to be obtained.'

"During the fifteen or twenty years before the War," continued the Marshal, "our politicians acquired the habit of reducing everything to Parliamentary discussions, rhetorical displays and lobby intrigues. The evils of the system were not then apparent, for France was prosperous and the budget easy to balance. To-day it is no longer practicable. We have post-War problems as difficult as those of the War itself. We need different methods; otherwise we will continue to flounder."

I was preparing to leave him when he detained me.

"I have thought of two books—which I shall never write for want of leisure. The first is called *The Fallow Land*. It portrays the miserable state into which our administration has fallen. The second is entitled *The Bells*; by that term I denote the Parliamentary agitators who intrigue, make speeches and take up the working hours of ministers by forcing them to hear and answer their prattlings."

Foch then told me this amusing anecdote.

"At the last New Year lunch given by Alexandre

FRENCH POLICY

[President of the Republic], marshals as well as ministers were invited. We spoke of the death of General Buat and the void it caused in our General Staff.

“So you see, only old horses go on pulling the cart,” I said to one of the guests, in such a way that everyone could hear me, ‘Once they pass the difficult stage between twelve and fifteen, they can go on to twenty. It is true of men, and how much more true of generals!’

The Marshal laughed. “The guest whom I addressed did not know whether to smile or not.”

I was taking leave of him when he stopped me.

“Have you paid any great attention to the account of Ludendorff’s trial now taking place at Munich? Read it carefully; it will repay the trouble. It throws a curious light on a horrible world of Boches outvying each other in betrayals and abuse. They remind me of a basketful of crabs biting and tearing each other limb from limb.”

XL

FOCH ON THE COLLAPSE OF THE FRANC

March, 1924

THE first question the Marshal put to me was:
T “How are we situated financially?”

I told him what I had learnt, and my ideas on the existing situation and the energetic measures proposed by the Government.

“Those measures would have been entirely adequate six months ago, perhaps six weeks ago. But it is greatly to be feared that they cannot now have much effect.”

Foch spoke to me of the German manœuvres to wreck the franc. Colonel Harjes of the Morgan Bank, who had visited him the previous day, had told him some strange facts.

“Up to the present,” Harjes told me, ‘not a finger has been raised to counteract their tricks. The assailants are therefore in an excellent position. They are certain to win.’

“In spite of that,” Foch continued, “and in spite of the gloominess of the outlook, I am not pessimistic as to the future of the franc. It seems to me impossible

COLLAPSE OF THE FRANC

that we should suffer the same disaster as Germany and Austria. Circumstances here are totally different. The Germans wanted the mark to collapse in order to avoid payment of reparations. We have not the same wish. Also, France is self-sufficing. She provides for practically all her own needs. We have only to fall back on ourselves, work and wait."

Foch used exactly the same words during the two years that followed. He was fully as optimistic when, in July, 1926, the franc was in the gravest of plights; it steadily dropped in relation to the pound sterling and dollar, and there was every reason to fear that it would share the fate of the Austrian kroner and German mark.

I had been seriously impressed during my post-War journeys to Austria and Germany by all I had seen in those countries. I often expressed my alarm to the Marshal.

"You have entirely missed the point," he said to me brusquely on each occasion. "Unless we are lunatics or cowards, the franc can never suffer the fate of the mark. Moral and material conditions are entirely different. We may have complications, shocks and moments of distress, but you will inevitably see its stabilization sooner or later."

Even in the darkest hours of that troublous period, Foch did not once depart from his attitude of confi-

MARSHAL FOCH

dence and optimism. The point is worthy of emphasis, because it is a decisive proof, to my mind, of his acuteness of perception and clarity of judgment. He was convinced for all time that the financial battle would be like the military battle. In this case he believed that when we summoned up the will to win—and took energetic measures—we would be as victorious as we were in the War.

In matters of finance, politics and strategy Foch was equally clear-sighted. He instantly pierced the superficial and incidental and reached fundamentals and reality.

He never appeared to me so wonderful and so great as when his faith and his reason caused him to take up the defence of the franc.

XLI
AFTER THE ELECTIONS

June, 1924

RESPECTING the elections that brought into power the Cartel Government, Foch related a curious incident.

"In June, 1923, nearly a year before the elections, I went to see Poincaré at the request of three Cabinet Ministers: Maginot, Reibel and another.

"‘Monsieur le Président, the elections are drawing near,’ I said. ‘They will exert a powerful influence on foreign and domestic affairs. All our actions during the last four years, and even the results of the victory, may be made matters of controversy. It is therefore essential to take the affair in hand. Have you thought of it?’

"‘I have been thinking of nothing else, and I shall devote part of my vacation to it. I shall see the departmental prefects individually and give them my instructions.’

"To which Foch answered: ‘But, Monsieur le Président, you have not the time for everything. Diplomacy, the Ruhr and foreign policy monopolize your

MARSHAL FOCH

attention. How will you find leisure in which to receive the prefects?"

"I must do it myself," said Poincaré sharply.

"All my efforts were in vain, so I left him. I gave an account of my visit to a minister, who said: 'That means the end of us.'

"After the elections of May 11, Poincaré and I went to Verdun, where we were acclaimed by the crowd.

"What wonderful people!" said Poincaré. "If only everyone else were as enthusiastic! Unhappily, everyone isn't—far from it."

"And why are these people wonderful?" I demanded. "Because you personally were at pains to enlighten them; you took active steps and obtained excellent results. But in other parts of the country, the South for instance, no one undertook to do likewise. How, in Heaven's name, can you expect similar results elsewhere?" "

XLII
FOCH AND THE NEW EUROPE

October, 1924

AT ten o'clock in the morning, one of the Marshal's two aides-de-camp, Bugnet, telephoned to my home.

"The Marshal has read your last article in the *Revue de France*. He wants to talk to you about it. Come and see him one afternoon soon."

I decided to go that very day at five o'clock.

Foch was engaged with General Ragueneau, Deputy Head of General Staff. I waited a few minutes with Bugnet.

The Marshal was in great spirits and walked up and down his room. Without sitting down, he at once began discussing the subject of my article, Franco-German relations and security. I noticed a curious trait, highly characteristic of his mind and intellect. Security and the maintenance of peace were among his favourite subjects, and had been constantly in his thoughts since our last meeting ten days previously. They had gathered substance from his mind, and developed as though they were living things. The week

MARSHAL FOCH

before, the theme had been barely outlined and the Marshal's arguments somewhat sketchy; but now they had matured into extraordinary abundance.

"The central idea, the key position, is this: What was the object of the Allies when they made peace? To obtain compensation for their sacrifices, naturally, and something more besides: to make of war an impossibility. That was their main preoccupation. They talked and thought of nothing else. Their duty, which took on an ethical, almost religious, aspect in their eyes, was to render impossible all butchery like the War they had just won, to prevent the destruction of so many millions of human lives, to avoid the sinking of so great a part of the capital of humanity.

"With what ardour and enthusiasm did they begin creating world-peace! Read the first declarations and interviews of Wilson when he set foot in Europe, of Lloyd George, and Clemenceau. World-peace was their primary concern, their duty to civilization and humanity. Anything but world-peace would be treason to the dead.

"Read the speeches of Wilson, Lloyd George, and Clemenceau if you have time. You will see to what heights and what heat they rose.

"You must understand that thoroughly, for it is the basis of the whole affair. If you have a clear grasp of that vital point, all the rest will be clear too.

THE NEW EUROPE

"At the present moment," said Foch, "the various Governments seem to have forgotten the attitude of their leaders of that day. They think and speak of totally different matters, the high cost of living, the price of bread, the Geneva conferences, etc. But they must return to the former attitude and preoccupy themselves with the primary object if they wish to save something of the results of our victory. Otherwise, we shall have won the War to no purpose.

"The problem of security is submerged in a far greater, higher matter: the maintenance of peace. We must preserve peace at all costs.

"We are not involved alone. The whole of Europe is concerned. And Europe is—what?"

Foch took my arm and drew me over to a large map hanging on the wall.

"There you have the Europe made by our politicians and diplomats. When they were engaged on their task, I confess that I sometimes had goose-flesh. I felt my hair stiffen on my head. Anyhow, such as it is you can see it before you. Look at it a moment. It is a mosaic, an extraordinary patch-work of frontiers and peoples. Look at Czechoslovakia, for instance. It is a strange conglomeration. Where and what are her frontiers? They were obviously not determined by considerations of strategy. There were more politicians

MARSHAL FOCH

than generals on the council that re-modelled Europe."

The Marshal took my hand and moved my forefinger along a very long, narrow strip of Czechoslovakian territory that ran needle-like between Hungary, Poland and Rumania.

"One of our officers went to that country two years ago. He travelled to the furthest extremity of the strip, which is as narrow and tapering as the Italian peninsula. The latter, however, has the advantage of being surrounded by sea, which facilitates its defence; whereas the Czechoslovakian strip is insinuated amongst its bitterest and fiercest enemies, the Hungarians. To go from Prague, for instance, to the eastern extremity of Czechoslovakia's Carpathian provinces, the shortest and simplest way lies through Budapest. The strip would, therefore, be patently difficult to defend.

"Poland also has singularly vulnerable frontiers.

"In the midst of those new creations, which because of their newness are unstable, you have Germany with a population of sixty millions. Soon she will have sixty-five millions. We, and we alone, are supporting the whole weight. If our strength fails, these structures are in danger of collapse.

"That is how you must understand the problem of security. You must visualize it in all its magnitude and complexity. It is not limited to the Rhine barrier.

THE NEW EUROPE

Far from that. It consists in the maintenance of peace in Europe at all costs—the peace made by the treaties that followed on our victory.

“Suppose that Germany exercises her sway over those states. Even if it be only a moral influence, they will thus be gravitating within her orbit. Can you imagine the tremendous power she would then have? It would be futile to fight against her. The cause would be lost before the battle started.”

XLIII

FOCH AND THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

October, 1924

THE recent session at Geneva led Foch to discuss the League of Nations.

"What was it at first? You can read the text of the treaty. What was the object of the Powers who inaugurated it? It was always to prevent war and maintain the results of the victory. That was the predominant idea.

"But what happened? The foremost of those Powers, the United States, withdrew before even entering the League. That meant a huge diminution of moral and material strength.

"After the first phase, many neutral countries joined. They were foreign, indifferent to the aspiration of the Allies. They devoted scant interest and attention to our aims. The spirit of the League was necessarily modified. It became an assembly of neutral countries. The maintenance of existent frontiers affected most of them only indirectly. That was the second stage, where we still are to-day.

"What will be the third stage, the immediate future

THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

of the League? Germany is about to join. It will be alleged that she conforms in spirit to that of the League. If you hope that she will desire to maintain the frontiers forced on her, which she has never acknowledged in her heart, and which, bluntly speaking, she loathes and yearns to destroy—if you can hope that, you must have more than your share of naïveté.

“What can be said of the introduction of Russia, which will come sooner or later? Her Government loses no opportunity of proclaiming her lack of affinity with any other government in Europe or in the world. Her principles have nothing in common with those on which all other states are organized. Yet you expect her to adhere in all loyalty to the spirit and plans of the League of Nations! If you really have such expectations, I can only say, ‘A truce to such fooling.’

“The attitude adopted by its founders is weakening more and more; it is like good wine increasingly diluted with water. Soon you will have great difficulty in discerning the original principles of the League—if, indeed, you can perceive them at all.”

The Marshal had been standing all the time, and now sat down.

“And now,” he said, “it is my turn to ask questions. What is the position now?”

“It has not greatly altered,” I said, “except that the

MARSHAL FOCH

Herriot ministry is meeting with increasing difficulties, which was not difficult to foretell."

"And they will not cease," said Foch. "The most serious are of the economic, financial order: the higher cost of living, the embarrassed circumstances of the Treasury, the demands of officials and the budget, which, I fear, will balance only on paper.

"A long cure is needed to make our financial situation a healthy one. It could not be done in a day or a month or a year. Where can we find a minister who would shoulder such a burden? How can he obtain peace of mind and time for deep reflection, if he is to be worried by everyday cares and the need to defend himself in Parliament, and so forth? The two tasks are incompatible. You cannot ask a man to wage the daily Parliamentary war and also to shut himself in his room to construct a lasting scheme.

"You see what happens at the Ministry of War. We can truthfully say that since 1919 we have not had a War Minister who has busied himself with his task of reconstituting the army we need. When General Nollet, who is an intelligent, hard-working, well-informed man, took over his appointment, he was aghast at the disorder reigning in the Ministry.

"Yet something might have been done. Never have we had so strong a Superior Council of War. The generals composing it were selected by as stern a judge

THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS

as they could well have: the battle-field. All those who had the least flaw or weakness were vigorously banished from it. Only the best remained. There was every reason for them to undertake the work of reconstruction, which they were perfectly capable of doing well. But, as a matter of fact, the Superior Council of War has never done so little work. It has not only been given nothing to do, but also forbidden to occupy itself with any business.

“As for the financial situation, I was saying to Painlevé and Borel the other day, at the Académie des Sciences:

“‘You have had your elections and think you are now free to do what you want. You are labouring under a delusion. You have never been less free. Either you must map out a reasonable, moderate policy, or else the financial situation—which is stronger than you—will soon bring you to your senses.’”

XLIV
FINANCIAL CRISIS: LOCARNO

October, 1924

I SAW the Marshal after a long interval, during which he had been in Brittany and the South of France. He was in mufti and, I thought, looked well; he was still sturdy, erect and full of energy.

The political situation, especially its financial aspects, was worrying him. The plight of the franc was becoming worse.

“What is your impression?” I asked him.

He thought a moment and lit his pipe.

“This. France as a land is prosperous; as a state, she is in ruins. It is her Government who has ruined her.

“Why do we uphold the Government? you will ask. Because up to the present the people as a whole have not suffered greatly through it. Take the peasants as an example. They have never been richer and more flourishing. In the little Breton village where I have some land, the tax-collector told me the other day that during the last twelve months he has sold two million francs’ worth of Treasury Bonds. Over the same

FINANCIAL CRISIS: LOCARNO

period, can you guess the taxes on agricultural profits? Fifty thousand francs.

"Workmen, also, are very well paid. The only sufferers are the people with fixed incomes, the middle classes. All they can do is to complain. There you have the whole explanation. That is also why I see no immediate remedy."

"Do you not think that the depreciation of our currency, which will be increasingly hard to bear, will also increase the general suffering and aggravate the evil? We shall have to descend to great depths of distress before a remedy can arise. Are we not nearing a financial collapse of the kind that occurred in Germany?"

"Take the case of the owner of a handsome estate who spends too much and whose bank-balance is increasingly embarrassed," said Foch. "How can he set himself financially on his feet? The first thing to do—the only thing to do—is to take from him the administration of his property as soon as he shows his incapacity. A syndicate must be formed. Its function is to draw up a balance-sheet and reduce expenses. In a few years the situation is saved. France is in the position of that owner.

"I by no means believe, moreover, that the franc will collapse to the same extent as the mark. Our position differs from that of Germany. Her Government issued

MARSHAL FOCH

notes by the milliard, by hundreds of milliards. We shall never come to that."

I then mentioned the Locarno pacts.

"They are very complicated," he said. "Clarity is not their chief merit. They are constantly referring to article fourteen and article sixteen.

"But taking them as a whole, we can see that they please everyone, great and small; Germany, France, and even Poland and Czechoslovakia.

"That proves that they cannot be very bad. In any case, they allow Europe to enjoy a lull, and, above all, they give the young nations born of our victory time to consolidate themselves. They can become harder and more substantial. Poland, for instance, abounds in proofs of her vitality. Certainly, the establishment of the gold standard there has had some curious results. It is bringing about strong restriction of credit. A great landowner like Prince X, possessing thousands of acres, is very heavily taxed. Although he sells all the corn, beets and cows he possibly can, he is unable to realize enough money to pay his taxes. Money is very tight. The Finance Minister stands as firmly as a rock and declares that he will not issue one note that is not guaranteed by the gold reserve.

"In the meantime, the country works hard, has a considerable output, and is growing rich. This year, she is exporting quantities of sugar to England. Her

FINANCIAL CRISIS: LOCARNO

army is strong. All that may well fill us with confidence."

One of Foch's characteristics was a reasonable optimism based on the belief that a nation, like a man, is more or less master of its fate. He held that if one or the other took a firm stand, he could always surmount the obstacles in his path.

The Marshal asked me if I had seen Lyautey on his return from Morocco.

"Not yet," I answered. "I have just finished an article expressing fully my high opinion of him."

"He is a very great servant of his country," said Foch. "The services he has rendered us are immense."

"The manner in which he was received and thanked was scarcely worthy of the Government," I answered.

"That is only to be expected," said Foch, philosophically. "Ingratitude, and even deliberate ungraciousness, regulate the attitude of governments towards those who deserve something better at the hands of their country. When Weygand returned from Syria, no one was at the station to meet him, not even a War Office or Foreign Office clerk!"

XLV

THE GODS IN THE FRENCH MACHINE

February, 1926

THE Marshal had returned from Brussels, where he had gone for the funeral of Cardinal Mercier. He had seen the King, but only for a few moments at the ceremony. I spoke of the great reductions made in the Belgian Army.

"Our neighbours are disarming as rapidly as they can," he said.

"How is the new Government progressing, and what of the socialists in it?"

"Vandervelde came over and greeted me. He is full of importance and very much the diplomat. I noticed that he is getting deafer than ever."

"That, sir, is sometimes a precious quality in a statesman."

"Socialism in Belgium is largely coöperative socialism. It deals less with politics than with professional questions. It aims at ameliorating the condition of the workmen."

THE GODS IN THE MACHINE

I pointed out that German socialism had been very much the same before the War

“And Germany, sir?”

“Her economic situation is serious. She lacks both outlets in business, and credit in her banks. But the Government is more solidly placed. The budget balances and even shows a surplus. Everything is quiet and orderly. I am under the impression that the Stresemann Government represents the great majority of Germans. They avoid foreign ventures, and aim at Germany’s commercial recovery and industrial prosperity. Germany will speedily occupy her pre-War position. That is how they propose to bring it about.

“At the New Year reception given by the President of the Republic, I was speaking to M. Briand.

“‘Monsieur le Président,’ I said, ‘Germany will soon teach France how a country can progress with a republican constitution. The lesson is unexpected and paradoxical, but I assure you that it will be given.’

“Briand began to laugh.

“‘Help, help!’ he called to the other ministers: ‘Come and help me, all of you. Marshal Foch is attacking me.’

“Before all the ministers, I repeated what I had just said to Briand. ‘The Germans have succeeded in establishing a republic which assures them of a strong, stable government. As it is sure of a certain duration

MARSHAL FOCH

of power, it is able to create favourable conditions in Germany and make her a prosperous country. The day is not far distant when we shall have to go to them for examples and information.'

"‘What on earth can I do?’ replied Briand. ‘You know the instincts of the Germans. They all follow their leader like wild ducks. We do exactly the opposite. Look at the Palais-Bourbon, where my five or six hundred sparrows spend their time twittering and quarrelling. How can you expect me to govern?’

“I let the futile discussion drop. I could have answered his question with the greatest of ease, but what was the use?”

We spoke of the political situation, especially in its financial aspect.

“You know my phrase, but I will repeat it—not that I am proud of it or feel an author’s vanity; but I believe it expresses the truth. France as a land is rich; as a state, she is in ruins, and it is the Government who has ruined her. Its only thought was to satisfy the ever-increasing demands of the electorate. So long as you refrain from attacking the root of the evil, that is, the nature of the Government, you will obtain no amelioration. Take the present debate as an example. It began ten days ago, and will last another ten. Then the question will go before the Senate. In the meantime, the world goes on, prices soar, and discontent

THE GODS IN THE MACHINE

becomes stronger and stronger. One day there will be a crisis. Officials are complaining bitterly, not without good cause. I know how my officers are situated. Last year, they were promised additional pay for this year; the increase amounted in the case of colonels to eight or nine hundred francs. As yet, they have received nothing. Some of them depended on it for paying urgent bills. All, high and low, are in the same plight.

“Members of Parliament can see things only in relation to their Palais-Bourbon debates, and so they have not perceived the facts. When they are told so, they appear astonished and almost shocked. ‘But we are working very hard,’ they say; ‘we debate and vote. Deuce take it, what more can you want?’”

“It’s true that they debate, make speeches and vote. But what is the use of their labours if nothing good comes of them? Their mentality is significant and, I fear, incurable.”

“Can you see a remedy?” I asked.

“None,” he answered, “under present circumstances. It’s folly to expect them to reform themselves. They are convinced that all is for the best. Why should they change? Who can bring about a crisis? Only events can do that, and I am afraid that they may not be amenable to discipline.

“For a parliamentary and republican system to function in a normal fashion,” said the Marshal, “there must

MARSHAL FOCH

be definite dividing lines between the legislative, executive and judiciary departments. In the France of to-day, all those powers are intermingled in confusion. They are in the hands of five or six hundred deputies whose sole aim is their own re-election. Their eyes are therefore constantly on the electorate. What can you achieve with such material? Compare the other republican states. In America, the President is above and beyond all parliamentary fluctuations, so that the land is sure of four years of continuity. In Germany, also, the President has great power.

"Without security and continuity, no Government could surmount present-day difficulties.

"It was different before the War, when those difficulties had not arisen or had not yet assumed such immense proportions; then the land was overflowing with wealth and resources, and questions were less urgent, and less critical. You might say we had an old cart that ambled its comfortable way over even, unrutted ground.

"But the War came and went, and the ground was ploughed up, and huge obstacles arose in the path; the rest of the world had progressed and yet we tried to drag our cart from the barn and travel as before. It's ridiculous, laughable. While others have cars and aeroplanes, we try to use our old contraption. When it embeds itself in mud, we are content to change one or

THE GODS IN THE MACHINE

two mules. We can hardly be surprised if the change proves unavailing.

"In opposition to the powerless deputies, we have the technicians of finance, manufacturers, merchants, and heads of the leading chambers of commerce; they take alarm, and come and tell you: 'But there are some possible remedies. Only let us apply them.'

"They are perfectly right. There are some possible remedies. Under what conditions can they effect a cure? They must be applied by competent administrators. Then, last in order but foremost in importance, those competent administrators must have enough power and authority to apply them. You may turn the question this way and that, but you cannot evade the issue."

XLVI

POINCARE, LYAUTHEY, WINSTON CHURCHILL

March, 1927

I SAW the Marshal on my return after two months in Morocco. I found him in excellent health, his face untired, and no trace of the weight of his years.

He questioned me about my journey.

"Wherever I went, sir, I was reminded of Marshal Lyauthey. He has put new life and energy into the land. He rushed it through the various stages of colonization. In five or ten years he has done work that would have taken another man fifty."

"You are absolutely right," said the Marshal. "Lyauthey is a genius at organization. Nothing could be more admirable than his work over there. I know the opinions of excellent foreign judges, English and American. They are all amazed after their visits.

"I very much want to go to Morocco soon myself. What would be the best time? Do you think it would be too hot towards the end of spring?"

"That is far the best time," I told him; "most of the tourists have then betaken themselves elsewhere. The land is one immense carpet of green and flowers. The

POINCARÉ, LYAUTHEY, CHURCHILL

heat is quite bearable except, perhaps, at Fez; even there it is not too bad."

I questioned him on the military projects then under consideration, the reorganization of the Army and the organization of the frontier.

"Who could write a good article for the *Revue de France* on the organization of the frontier? It is a subject of obvious interest to everyone."

He thought a moment.

"I do not know of anyone except Weygand who has written about it. The Government forbade him to publish his opinions because he was not sufficiently orthodox about the League of Nations and Locarno. Our officials are very touchy on the subject, you know. You have to share their creed or else you are excommunicated.

"Anyhow, there is no disadvantage in waiting a while. Let them vote on the Army project first. Any discussion of the frontiers at present would only increase the confusion already existing.

"The military project is far from being perfect, but anything must be better than the present position. So it should be voted on as soon as possible."

He then dealt with financial and home affairs.

"On the whole, Poincaré is a great success. That is the essential point. He has effected a considerable and increasing improvement. Hence he must remain in

MARSHAL FOCH

power as long as possible. He has his faults, so have we all; but he is much the best of our politicians and makes the best possible head of our Government. He has no notion of the strength of his position in the country. I am constantly telling him that he can do what he wills. The essential is for him to will. Poincaré's great merit, besides his honesty and straightforwardness, is his capacity for hard work. He has a thorough knowledge of the questions on which he speaks and acts, because he takes the trouble to study."

I mentioned Winston Churchill's book, which had just been published. In it Churchill was loud in his praise of Foch.

"It is one of the most interesting and most living books written on the War," I said.

Foch, who had read only extracts, agreed.

"Winston Churchill is an excellent journalist," he said, "although as a statesman he by no means meets with my unqualified approval. The operations he planned, the Anvers expedition at the beginning of the War and the Gallipoli affair in the following year, for instance, are open to very severe criticism. He seems to imagine that a really good plan or idea is sufficient in itself. That is not the case. The worth of the plan lies in its execution, which must be properly arranged. There you have the reason for the failure of those two enterprises."

XLVII
FOCH AND EUROPEAN PEACE

November, 1927

CAN you give me some of your time?" asked the Marshal.

He took some large sheets of paper covered with his fine, regular writing and began to read aloud.

It was an admirable piece of work, a luminous, profound analysis of the state of Europe from the military and diplomatic points of view.

"A four years' war and the subsequent peace have divided Europe into two sections, the winners and the losers. The winners have even less reason to make war than in 1914. Peace will never be threatened by them. Does that hold true also of the losers? Have they resigned themselves to their defeat and the moral and material losses it entails? Who can say? Germany, for instance, was for centuries moulded in character and instincts by Prussia, who regarded war as a lucrative national industry; she will experience much difficulty in changing her mentality and outlook.

"Could Germany find other countries in Europe also desirous of profiting by a return to the old state of

MARSHAL FOCH

things? Of course she could. Peace is in danger from that quarter, and from that quarter alone.

"How can it be scotched? By disarming Germany? No one could now say that such a means would be efficacious. A rich commercial country like Germany can rapidly transform her peace-time industries into war activities. Her Army may be small numerically, but it is excellently composed, and could speedily combine with its reserves into a very powerful instrument of war.

"Some other method must be found. The only means is a close confederacy between the Allies, who must be determined to impose the Peace Treaty at all costs and in a thorough fashion. We cannot be saved otherwise.

"How can that bond be forged? Its creation is attended by many difficulties in the case of a democratic, parliamentary nation, where an election is enough to change the attitudes, ideas and intentions of her leaders. Unless, then, the immediate interests of a nation are to be sacrificed, a certain number of her organizations must be placed beyond reach of party quarrels and rifts, so that national policies may be assured of continuity.

"Germany has them. She has her *Reich*. The ministry has not changed for nearly ten years. She also has a President of the Republic.

EUROPEAN PEACE

"England has them. Her Admiralty has its own principles, traditions and staff, and a lasting policy. So has her Foreign Office.

"France, most unhappily, has nothing like that. The Superior Council of War was very influential before 1914, but has lost its sway. It does very little, almost nothing; a lamentable state of affairs. There remains one body, the Conference of Ambassadors, which vitally needs additional strength.

"You must not believe that the Geneva chit-chat can do everything. It serves principally to display the personal success of such-and-such a politician, who only too easily tends to believe that his speech and its 'prolonged cheers' have settled the affairs of the universe.

"Our country has no more vital or more pressing need than for such permanent bodies, that can direct our military and foreign policies unmoved by parliamentary and ministerial fluctuations.

"You must not forget this," said the Marshal, and ended with the words: "The permanent alone is great.

"Would you care to publish the study in the *Revue de France?*" he added.

I said that we would be delighted.

A few days later, the Marshal sent it to me. It appeared as a leader in the *Revue de France* dated January 1, 1928, above the signature *Three Stars*.

XLVIII

FOCH AND WEYGAND

NAPOLEON cannot be separated from his Chief of Staff, Berthier; still less can Foch and Weygand be imagined apart.

During the whole of the War and the years that followed, they worked together, thought together and acted together. They did not leave each other for a single day. From their continuous collaboration issued the well-known and wonderful results.

The Marshal hid the warmest of hearts under a seeming coldness. He had the liveliest affection for Weygand. When the latter left for Syria after so long a time with Foch, the Marshal gave it free rein.

I went to see Foch a few days after the departure. I had written a long article in *L'Illustration* on Weygand, and Foch mentioned it with emotion, telling me what great pleasure it had given him.

“I am very deeply attached to Weygand,” he said. “He is an admirable man. The more you know him, the higher he rises in your appreciation and friendship. During the War, especially at the most critical moments, he was of incalculable assistance to me.”

FOCH AND WEYGAND

"Many inaccurate accounts," he went on, in pursuance of his theme, "have been given of our meeting and his appointment to my Staff. This is what happened.

"When Joffre transferred me from my command of the 20th Corps to that of the new army he was constituting in the centre of our forces, he himself chose my Staff. The previous year his infallible perceptions and certain judgment had distinguished and appreciated Weygand at the Ecole des Maréchaux. He appointed him and Colonel Devaux to be my colleagues.

"Personally, I had had only brief and occasional encounters with Weygand, although he was in my *corps d'armée* and second in command of a cavalry regiment. Our relations were the usual ones between the commandant of an army corps and a colonel.

"When the time came to take up my new command, a difficulty arose: which of the two was to be my Chief of Staff? Weygand was senior in service, but Devaux held a brevet. The question was submitted to me, and I settled it with my usual quickness. 'I will take the senior. If he is no good to me, back he goes to his regiment in a few days' time.' I was to keep him nine years.

"Weygand's characteristics are lucidity of mind, self-control, surety of judgment, and unqualified, unceasing devotion to the person or cause he has been ap-

MARSHAL FOCH

pointed to serve. He continuously developed them from the first day of our collaboration.

"You know the importance of the Chief of Staff, especially in the modern army. He is the necessary intermediary between the Commander-in-Chief and his officers. The Commander-in-Chief is alone, but there are many officers. The former gives general instructions, and his Chief of Staff amplifies them in detail and causes them to be obeyed.

"At such a task Weygand was wonderful. His mind was so accurate, clear and systematic that nothing remained in obscurity. His orders were given in such a way that no hesitation or delay was entailed. He also gave me an hourly account of the events over the whole of the Front. His method was perfect. I was promptly informed of all happenings of note.

"In the time of Napoleon, a Chief of Staff was hard-worked. His task was light, however, beside the labour of his modern successor. Armies are larger; services have increased to an alarming extent—transport, motor, railway and air, and the rest. To set the whole machine in motion and keep a firm hold of yourself in the midst of all your preoccupations, you need a methodical brain, an active, tireless mind, and an indomitable will; besides these, you must be so attuned physically and mentally to your task that at any hour

FOCH AND WEYGAND

of the day or night events produce in you the necessary reflexes.

“Weygand possesses all those qualities. When it was necessary for him to play a leading, not a secondary part—for the Red Armies were advancing on Warsaw in the gravest of circumstances—he had to make weighty decisions. You know how marvellous was his judgment. As soon as he arrived, he promptly reduced the confusion to clarity. He planned an operation and carried it out. The Red Armies were checked and Poland was saved.

“He is not only a great—a very great, general, but he is also an admirable administrator. You may be sure that he will do marvels in Syria and wherever else he is sent.”

XLIX

HOW FOCH LIVED IN THE COUNTRY

WHEN I returned to Paris at the end of September, I went to see the Marshal, whom I had not visited since July. I complimented him on his healthy appearance. He had spent two months in his house in Brittany, broken only by one or two journeys to Paris, which had done him much good.

"How do you spend your time in the country?" I asked him.

In his clear, rather abrupt voice, the Marshal said: "I plan stratagems with my trees." Then, as he saw my smile, "You must take that very seriously," he said. "My place, Treufeuntiniou, in the Ploujean district, is by the sea, a few kilometres from Morlaix. The wind blows there very strongly sometimes. In defence against its whirling attacks from the time when I bought it—years ago now—I busied myself with finding spots where lines of trees might serve as ramparts."

"When and why did you buy your estate?" I asked.

"About 1895, I felt the need of a fixed abode; I wanted to pitch my tent somewhere, after leading the usual military life of wandering from garrison to garri-

FOCH IN THE COUNTRY

son and changing houses. It is a natural desire for a man to have when he is past his first youth. My wife, as you know, was born in Brittany. And husbands, in contradiction to the law, often—in fact, nearly always—follow their wives. Nine times out of ten they show good sense in doing so. That is why I bought my little place. Its one adornment is its trees and flowers.

“The park is about seventy acres in extent, with two or three farms. I hope you will visit me there one day, although you are so fervently attached to Provence. We’ll show you the beauties of Brittany. The house is very simple but quite pleasing, with harmonious lines. I think it must have been built between 1820 and 1825, when the emigrants had returned. It is a Breton manor, one of many in those regions. Here are some water-colours by my friend Fossa that show it exactly as it is.”

“Your neighbour in those parts, Weygand, once said to me, sir: ‘As soon as the Marshal arrives, he grabs his pruning-scissors and mercilessly cuts off all that is “pruneable.” When there is nothing left to cut, he goes away.’”

“There is a good deal of truth in that,” said Foch, smiling. “I spent part of my summer writing a preface to the *Memoirs of Field-Marshal Wilson*, the great English soldier and my comrade. We were linked by

MARSHAL FOCH

an affection of great depth and old standing, and drawn still closer by the memory of the tragic hours we passed together. The *Memoirs* may prove a boulder in the duck-pond of diplomats and politicians. They contain some harsh truths, some of which will make rather unpleasant reading for certain English and Continental statesmen. Each morning I wrote a certain number of pages, then left my table, got my stick and pruning-scissors and took a proprietary stroll round the park. After that I settled down to work again.

"I live there with my family—my wife and daughters, and my many grandchildren, who are a houseful in themselves. Neighbouring landowners come to see me. Sometimes a distinguished French or foreign guest, soldier or diplomat, goes out of his way to visit me. This summer my most notable guest was General Pershing.

"You know that my dear old friend Weygand owns an estate in those regions. As the crow flies we are very near each other, but actually we have to walk some five kilometres to meet each other, because we have to go by Morlaix. Curiously enough, we are so near together by a mere coincidence, pure chance. Weygand's wife was born in Brittany too, and she wanted him to live there. Towards the end of the War, he was looking for a place where he could find rest, found a house that suited him, and bought it. 'You cannot get away

FOCH IN THE COUNTRY

from me now, whether you want to or not,' I told him.

"I was at Treufeuntiniou in July, 1914," said Foch, as though a strange memory had just leapt into his mind. "I was there during the tragic week before the War.

"After the rejoicings of July 14 at Nancy, where my *corps d'armée* was stationed, I saw M. Poincaré, the President of the Republic, and M. Viviani, the President of Council, set off on an official visit to Russia and the Scandinavian capitals. I thought that two such well-informed statesmen would obviously not be thus leaving their country unless the much-distressed Austro-Serbian tension after the Serajevo murder, and Balkan complications generally, had been exaggerated. My reasoning was speedily proved false on every point. I had only been a few days in Brittany among my trees and flowers when the Austrian ultimatum to Serbia broke among us like a bombshell. A few days later, I received a telegram from the War Ministry ordering me to rejoin my army corps immediately. That evening I started for Nancy. Soon War broke out. It was to keep me four years and more from my fields."

At the entrance to the manor, there is an austere little chapel, built in Breton style. Its chief decoration consists of two large marble tablets bearing the names of Germain Foch, cadet, and Captain Bécourt, the Marshal's son-in-law. They both died for France in 1914.

Every morning and every evening, when the family

MARSHAL FOCH

was together, Mme. Foch, her daughters and seven grandchildren said their prayers in the chapel. The Marshal often went there to meditate.

Foch combined a simple faith with an intellect of great strength and critical ability. The one sustained and enlivened the other. His nature was primarily a product of their powerful, active union.

One Sunday morning in the spring of 1918, at one of the most agonizing moments of the War, Clemenceau unexpectedly arrived at Foch's H.Q. He asked for the General. He was told that Foch was at Mass, and it was proposed to go and tell him immediately.

"Don't disturb him," said Clemenceau. "It has acted too well on him for that. I'll wait."

L

FOCH AND THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT

FOCH was speaking one day of an extremely active, clever politician for whom everyone predicted a splendid career.

"He is a sceptic," said Foch. "He believes in nothing. So he will come to nothing."

Coming from him, that verdict was unanswerable. Man, in Foch's view, was of a weak, vacillating nature, and unless he had solid support the slightest wind might well carry him wherever it willed. He compared man to his oft-quoted Roman legionary whose foresight always led him to provide for a firm tent at night by carrying with him a stake by day. Each of us should follow his example.

Foch himself was tranquil and perfectly certain on the point. His religious faith was the simple belief of a working-man. It gives him a fixed, unshakable foundation on which his whole existence was built and organized.

He was a fervent, convinced Catholic. But his Catholicism was comparable to that of our great seventeenth-century thinkers. The religion to which he

MARSHAL FOCH

gave unqualified adherence he made once and for all the basis of his inner life. Save for the usual religious practices, he rarely translated his beliefs into outward signs and manifestations. They were confined to his inner being. The famous phrase *in eo vivimus et sumus* might well be applied to the religion of Foch.

Religion formed his moral basis. It gave him the calmness of soul, the equilibrium needed by mankind. That was its great function. Duty, sacrifices, the complete subservience of physical instincts to spiritual aspirations, were made easier by religion.

The worth of man lay in his soul and mind. It was his duty first to develop the intelligence and reasoning powers with which he had been endowed, and then to devote them to the service of family, motherland and humanity. They were not to be used to gratify personal desires and procure base enjoyment, but should be consecrated to greater, nobler objects.

That rôle Foch had allotted to himself. No one could prize material joys less highly. They might not have existed. He was almost ascetic at table, and sought merely to satisfy his hunger. He wore the tunic and cap of a soldier. A tuppenny-ha'penny pipe and a packet of shag comprised his only pleasures.

Works of pure imagination, such as novels and poetry, did not interest him. On the other hand, he was passionately fond of history. Since Napoleon,

THINGS OF THE SPIRIT

there has been no great soldier who devoted such constant study to history, or whose knowledge was so detailed and thorough. In my opinion, he knew more than Napoleon. His outlook was more philosophical, and he could therefore see better into the complexity and movement of causes and effects, the connection between events and the few fundamental general laws of which they are but intermittent manifestations.

The many-sidedness of his genius is the best proof that Foch could have been a great political leader as well as a great general. He had the political sense, a feeling for politics, that is, for the laws regulating the relations of mankind. His profound knowledge of history, his penetrating insight into other nations, his power of instantly unearthing the basic elements of a country's psychology, character and temperament, were enhanced by care and study. His many gifts gave to his outlook on Europe singular precision, keenness and truth. The map of Europe that hung on the walls of his room was always before his eyes, the constant object of his meditations. It was a living, coloured, concrete thing to him. It appeared to him in its static and dynamic states as did battle-fields to Napoleon. He perceived the opposing forces by which it was torn and mined, as he saw the more or less stable, lasting balance that it was possible and imperative to establish between them.

MARSHAL FOCH

The new Europe, born of the Allied victory which he did more than anyone else to produce, he regarded as a loving, tender father regards his child. He was far from judging her perfect. If his counsel had been heeded, she would have been appreciably different; her constitution would have been stronger, and above all, she would have been infinitely better protected against the grave dangers that beset her, dangers arising solely from a desire for vengeance on the part of the vanquished nations.

But the Marshal was essentially a realist. Regrets and recriminations were not in keeping with his character. The new building was to be kept as it was and watched for signs of crumbling or cracking. The cement was to be given time to dry and solidify.

“Give a few more years to the young nations sprung from our victory,” he would say. “You will see that Czechoslovakia, Poland and Yugo-Slavia will consolidate their positions. You will be astonished by their development and progress. Only they must have time and peace.

“The burden of maintaining European peace lies mainly on France. The new Europe is supported by her. If she weakens or wavers, the whole structure is in peril.”

Hence he was always on the watch for signs of weakening so that he might indicate them and have

THINGS OF THE SPIRIT

them remedied. A sound army, sound finances and a sound Government were what he wanted for France. He used his great power and authority to give her rulers the advice inspired by his keenness of vision and good sense.

LI

THE SECRET OF A GREAT LEADER: THOUGHT AND ACTION

I HAVE seen Foch at work during the battles of the Marne and the Yser; times without number I have heard him speak of the great difficulties he had to solve during the War and afterwards. If I now had to ask myself what was the secret of his genius, how should I reply? When his gifts and qualities have been seen, studied and distilled, what remains in the alembic?

In his solitude at Saint Helena, Napoleon applied the same question to himself. According to him, a great general is made by reason of the harmony and balance between his intellect and will. Patently, the two forces must be developed to the utmost, but the equilibrium between them is the essential factor. He expressed his idea by a mathematical formula: a great soldier must square his height to his breadth. It would, I fear, be difficult to find a better phrase, so I will apply it to Foch.

What was the outstanding feature of his intellect? His ability to discern almost immediately the salient point of the most complicated, confused problem.

THOUGHT AND ACTION

During the battle of the Marne, it was the necessity of standing firm at all costs in order to prevent the enemy from breaking the centre of the French line. During the Yser, it was essential to bar the way to the Channel, for if the Germans had gained access to it, all communication between France and England would have been impossible. At the end of March, 1918, when the German onrush toward Amiens was at its height, it was imperative to maintain cohesion between the French and British Armies.

Those vital points Foch perceived immediately almost by instinct or intuition. He shared the trait with Napoleon. It is the spark of genius, the innermost secret of a great general.

Once the essential was discovered—here again the resemblance to Napoleon is striking—his whole mind set to work to find and employ the means appropriate to the desired results.

“You must work your brains,” he said. “You must make the phosphorus glow.”

Foch was continually repeating those phrases, which had a profound meaning for him. By translating them into action a general can prove that he is a great general. However good a plan may be, it is, *pace* the beliefs of the German General Staff, worthless by itself. Only great care in the execution, down to

MARSHAL FOCH

its smallest details, can render it efficacious and of sovereign virtue. In this respect Foch, like Napoleon, was admirable. He ruminated day and night over the problem, never once expelling it from his thoughts. He persisted in seeking new plans, improving those already in his mind. By dint of hard work and unceasing manipulation, he succeeded in alighting upon the best and simplest plans, which are generally discovered last of all.

During the battle of the Marne, the means he employed at the decisive hour was the marvellous flanking march of the 42nd Division, which was unexpectedly switched from his right (which held firm) to his yielding left. During the battle of the Yser, with great ingenuity and judiciousness he combined French, English and Belgian troops, solidifying a line that momently appeared at breaking-point and yet never broke. During the defensive he conducted in the great battle of 1918, he made clever use of the Franco-British reserves, who were unhappily much weakened and diminished. By disposing them with skill he succeeded, thanks to his economies and scrapings, in stopping the gap as well as possible. Then, when he had gained the initiative and could give full rein to his ideas, he subtly linked and interspersed his offensives until the entire line of the immense Front was in action.

Foch's leading idea and fundamental principle was

THOUGHT AND ACTION

that victory, contrary to the belief of most people, could never be a simple entity. Its components were infinite. The task of a leader was to seize the greatest possible number of them—Napoleon, too, did that—so that the least possible number might be left to chance. “Victory,” said Foch, “is won by bits and scraps. The supreme art of a general lies in combining them.”

So much for the intellectual side. Will-power now enters the question. However happy plans may be, their value resides in the energy and character of the leader charged to execute them. The morale of an army depends primarily on that of its head. He should constantly impress on the minds of his officers and men the thought that the battle will not be lost because it must not be lost. Thus weakness is stayed, and all retreat cut off. The only open path leads forward to victory.

This energy and will-to-conquer rose to great heights in Foch. Here again he was Napoleon’s peer. He may even have surpassed him, for the command he wielded, besides being of prodigious proportions, entailed of its very nature, difficulties and obstacles with which Napoleon was not confronted. The latter was an all-powerful master, and had only to issue orders to his army, wherein the non-French elements, proportionally very few, were absorbed into the being of the

MARSHAL FOCH

majority. On the other hand, Foch, during the last year of the War, was in command of armies at least half of which were foreign. His function of *generalissimo* and the exercise of his command thereby assumed an entirely different character. They called into play what I may term the qualities of his heart besides all his intellectual faculties. They developed at times into a species of apostleship. In addition to all the forcefulness of his brain and character, his moral powers, nobility, and virtue in the full sense of the term played their part.

On a last analysis, that seems to me the immense, the unique merit of Foch. It assures him a niche among the great soldiers of all countries and all ages.

LII

THE APOTHEOSIS OF FOCH

THE Marshal had often referred to the ceremony that the municipality of Cassel organized in his honour on July 7, 1928. A statue of him on horseback was to be raised on the hill dominating the town.

"It will be a fine ceremony," he told me. "Hosts of our English and Belgian friends are coming. I may even tell you in strict confidence that all the giants of Flanders are to be there. (You know, those huge figures drawn through the streets on days of public rejoicing.) We are going to gaze on an assembly of giants, which will be a great change. I invite you to come."

The little town of Cassel, which was his G.H.Q. during the whole of the battle in Flanders, was a particular favourite with the Marshal. It brought to his mind his most vivid, moving memories of the War—recollections of the battle of the Yser, when he met with such success in his capacity as *generalissimo* and united in perfect harmony and community of effort the Belgians, French and English.

Certainly the ceremony was magnificent. There are

MARSHAL FOCH

places that seem to be peculiarly favoured by history. Cassel is one of them. It is a natural G.H.Q., perched as it is on its high peak. It commands Flanders in its entirety, and was a marvellous watch-tower during the battle waged there, which equalled in importance that of the Marne.

The statue of the Marshal stands at the very top of the hill where rested the old castle, at the end of a charming little garden.

The ceremony was very moving and very beautiful. M. Raymond Poincaré had journeyed there for the express purpose of describing the military rôle played by the Marshal. His words had all their customary precision and clearness. M. Gabriel Hanotaux gave an address full of substance, truly noble and magnificent. He defined and lauded the work of the man termed "the great soldier." His was a voice from the majestic seventeenth century.

The Marshal was happy and touched, and, with his usual simplicity and graciousness, fell in with all the necessary demands of the ceremony. He was present as the processions filed past, and was specially moved by the lively, fervent homage of the populace.

My own joy was tinged by sadness. Hitherto I had always found Foch the same, with no trace of weakness or decline. The years seemed to float past, leaving no mark on him. But now, for the first time, I ob-

APOTHEOSIS OF FOCH

served signs of evident tiredness, of a slight sinking. His skin was dull and leaden in colour.

I remarked on it to one or two friends on his Staff who often saw him. They, too, had noticed it.

LIII

MY LAST CONVERSATIONS WITH THE MARSHAL

November, 1928

WHEN I returned from my holidays, I went to see the Marshal, who had, as usual, spent the summer in Brittany.

After I had left him I was extraordinarily sad. I had found him tired, older. His skin was no longer the same. His gestures and words had not their old vivacity and abruptness.

He questioned me on my work and my book, *Bonaparte à Toulon*, which was nearing publication. He began to speak of Napoleon. The subject, so full of interest and so deeply known to him, cheered and heartened him. For a few seconds he was the old Foch.

“What strikes me in him,” he said—and once more Foch pounced on the essential import of the matter—“is the maturity of mind he evinced at twenty-four. That was his exact age. Think what you were, and what I was, when we were twenty-four. I was just leaving the Ecole Polytechnique. You were wearing

LAST CONVERSATIONS

out the seat of your trousers on the benches of the Sorbonne. We were good pupils, extremely academic, almost exclusively so.

"At that age Napoleon was a young man with the mature intellect and character of a man of forty. His reasoning powers were strong, and he could comprehend all the aspects of a problem, however complex it might be. He could visualize military, strategic, political or historical questions, make plans and carry them into execution. That is what is truly prodigious.

"How can it be explained? Partly, it is obvious, by his own genius, which was of exceptional quality. Partly, too, by circumstances, also exceptional. Each factor complements the other.

"During the four years from the beginning of the Revolution to 1793, Bonaparte lived very intensely; those years counted for twice, even three times, their number. Observe his attitude on August 10 when he saw the Tuileries stormed and perceived the apathetic, weak King incapable of defending himself. If Bonaparte had lived in the reign of Louis XIV or if he had been in garrison at Tarbes, as I was at twenty-four, his powers, however extraordinary, would certainly not have provided him with his actual career.

"So your explanation comes to this: exceptional abilities and exceptional circumstances."

"His military genius," I said, "revealed itself in its

MARSHAL FOCH

entirety even so early as at Toulon. His thought already had the forcefulness necessary to swift discovery of the essential point and the vulnerable spot in the ground to be taken. His mind concentrated on fundamentals and shelved details."

"He was fine then," said Foch, "because he worked hard. Besides the talent for commanding, he also had the gift of swaying his men."

LIV

A GLANCE AT THE NEW EUROPE

December, 1928

I WENT to see the Marshal before leaving for the South of France, where I was going to spend Christmas and the New Year. He looked the same as on my last visit—tired and old.

I mentioned a series of articles on the origin of the new Europe that I was writing for the *Revue de France*.

"In connection with the young states born of our victory, I have begun with Czechoslovakia," I said. "I intend to continue with Poland."

"I stayed in Czechoslovakia a few years ago, on my return from Poland," answered the Marshal. "I have a firm belief in the future and development of the country. The Czech race really exists. You can no more discuss that fact than you can deny it. It was fated not to die, since it persisted in living through many centuries of oppression and slavery. That is a sure proof of its force and vitality."

"When I was in Czechoslovakia, I was taken to the battle-field of Sadowa. On the heights there stand two

MARSHAL FOCH

monuments, one to the Prussian soldiers and one to the Austrians. When we reached them, I mustered the civil and military leaders round the bases of the columns and made a short address:

“The Austrians and Germans battled against each other at Sadowa. In 1914 they fought side by side. Now you know where you can seek support, and what may be the future of the state you have just founded.”

“In addition to their natural qualities, the Czechs have shown themselves capable of finding excellent leaders, Masaryk, for instance, and Benès. They have furthermore had the great wisdom to leave them continuously in power since the end of the War, nearly ten years ago. That is an important thing to have done. A nation capable of such orderliness can certainly hope for a great destiny.

“As you know, they are also hard-working, upright, honest, intelligent and active. They are extremely successful in commerce and industry.

“You sometimes hear it said that they have no military aptitude. That’s nonsense. Their Anabasis, the retreat of the Czech troops into Siberia, was magnificent, from the military standpoint. They proved their powers of endurance, their discipline and heroism.

“You must not forget that the country has been deprived of her aristocracy. She is in process of consti-

THE NEW EUROPE

tuting another. Her Army is not despicable. The Czechs are on their guard against the Hungarians. They are quite right. The Hungarians are the personification of eternal discontent. Their instinct of opposition can never be eradicated."

After Bohemia, the Marshal naturally spoke of Austria.

"I stopped in that country for one day, when I was on the journey I have mentioned. Vienna is now merely a provincial town. The only thought of the adaptable population is to lead a pleasant life. Treaties will certainly not be flouted by Austria. There is no danger from that quarter."

"Would it have been possible, sir, to treat Austria any differently at the time of the peace negotiations? The question is constantly being raised, and I am curious to know your opinion."

"Absolutely impossible," said Foch, very firmly. "The empire of the Hapsburgs collapsed because it could no longer continue as it was. In twentieth-century Europe it was the most incredible and absurd of anachronisms. Had it been spared by the War, you may be certain that it would have been dismembered by other agents. It would have died from within instead of being killed from without. That would have been the only difference."

Speaking then of Poland, he said: "My favourable

MARSHAL FOCH

impression of the country is continually being confirmed. The Poles now number about twenty-five millions. In twenty years' time they will number forty millions. Their patriotism could not be more ardent. They lack political and parliamentary experience, but these flaws are counterbalanced by an admirable devotion to their land. That comes first with them. The Army is in good fettle. The country is hard at work. There, too, the position is being consolidated. Give Poland a few years of rest, and she will be perfectly capable of resisting agitation."

With those thoughts and those words on the state of Europe our conversation ended. It was the last I had with the Marshal. It showed his clear-sighted, logical optimism, and the confidence he felt in the destiny of the new Europe—the new Europe born of a victory mostly due to his genius.

As he saw me out, he stood in the doorway.

"We shall meet soon, after the holidays, when you have returned from the South," he said.

The door closed. I never saw him again.

(¹)

THE END

Mr. D. C. S.

100

